

HIGHLAND COUSINS

William Black

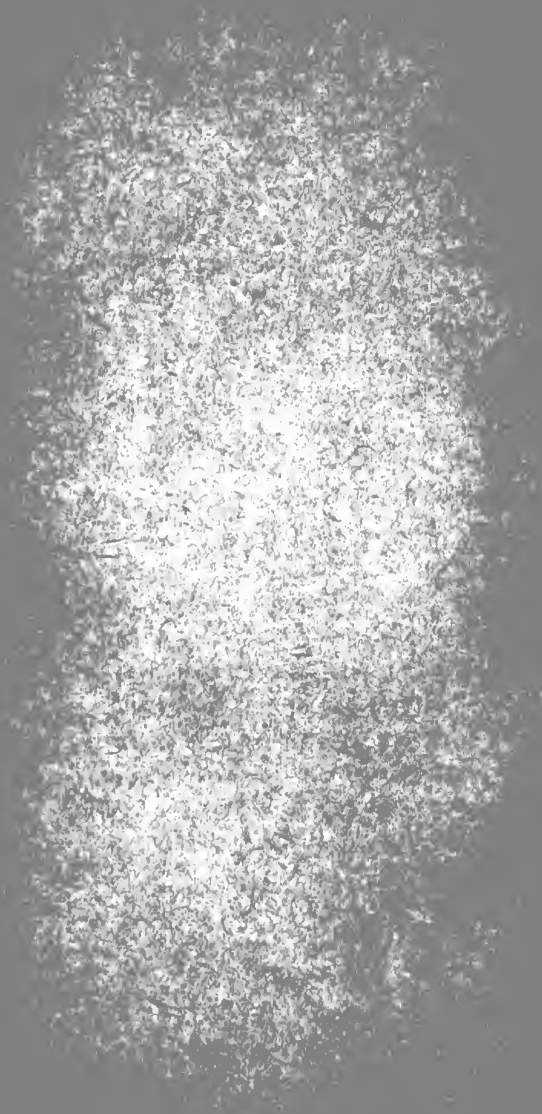


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To Miss Elspeth Campbell,
with W. Black's very kind regards and
HIGHLAND COUSINS
Remembrances. Brighton Nov. 1894.
A Nobel

BY
WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF
"A PRINCESS OF THULE," "MACLEOD OF DARE," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HIGHLAND COUSINS.

CHAPTER I.

A CONVOY.

AWAY out at the edge of the world, facing the wild Atlantic seas, a small and black procession was striving hard to make head-way against a blinding gale of rain and sleet. First came a horse and cart, and in the cart was a young woman, seated on a sack of straw, and wrapped up in a thick blue-green tartan shawl that in a measure protected her from the driving gusts; then followed a straggling company of middle-aged men, their figures pitched forward against the wind, their teeth clenched, the salt spindrift dripping from shaggy eyebrows and beard, while now and again the tail-end of a plaid, escaping from the clutch of frozen fingers,

would go flying aloft in the air. Occasionally one of the men, from mere force of habit, would stop for a moment to try to light his pipe; but even if his horny palms were sufficient to shelter the sulphur match, the wet tobacco would not burn, and the pipe was mechanically returned to its owner's pocket. There were two or three collies, trotting by the side of their respective masters; but what with the drenching showers and the bewilderment of the tumultuous waves, there was not a snap or a snarl left amongst them.

At length, however, the road the travellers were following, which hitherto had wound along the shore, struck inland; and at this corner stood a solitary and dismal-looking habitation. There was no sign of any kind to denote that here was offered entertainment for either man or beast; but no doubt the company knew the place; for as with one accord they left the highway and thronged into the narrow passage, pressing and jostling against each other. All of them, that is to say, except one—an elderly man, of respectable appearance, who seemed to hesitate about leaving the girl in the cart.

“Will you not come down, Barbara,” said

he, addressing her in the Gaelic tongue, "and step into the house?"

The young girl with the dark-blue Highland eyes and raven-black hair merely shook her head.

"Then will I bring you out a dram," said he, "or a piece of oatcake and cheese?"

"I am not wishing for anything," she answered, also speaking in Gaelic; and thereupon the elderly shepherd, considering himself relieved of present responsibility, followed his companions into the inn.

Apparently it was but a cold welcome they had received. There seemed to be no one about; nor was there any fire in the grate of this bare, damp-smelling, comfortless chamber into which they had crowded themselves. But they did not appear to mind much; all the pent-up speech suppressed by the storm had now broken loose; and there was a confused and high-surfing babblement about funeral expenses—arrears of rent—the sale of stock—the intentions of the factor—and what not; all of them talking at once, and at cross-purposes; contradicting, asseverating, with renewed striking of matches and sucking of difficult pipes. Indeed, so vehement and vociferous was the hubbub that

when a timid-looking young lass of about fourteen came along, bearing before her a shovel-full of burning peats, she could hardly win attention, until one of them called out—

“Make way for the lass there ! Come in, Isabel. And where is your mother and the whiskey ? ”

“ My mother is not so well to-day,” the girl replied, as she put the peats in the grate.

“ But you can get us the whiskey ? ” was the instant and anxious inquiry.

“ Oh, yes, indeed.”

“ Then make haste and bring it to us, for there is more warmth in a glass of whiskey than in all the peats in the island.”

“ And have you any oatcake in the house ? ” asked another.

“ No, there is no oatcake in the house,” the lass made answer. “ It is at this very moment that my grandmother is baking.”

She left the room, and shortly returned with a tray on which were ranged a number of thick tumblers and measures, the latter filled with a dull straw-coloured fluid ; whereupon each man apportioned his own and paid for the same. There was no drinking of healths, for they had come away from a

solemn occasion ; but this additional stimulant, following previous and liberal potations, awoke a fresh enthusiasm of eager speech—about pasture land and arable, the Crofters' Commission, the price of calves, and similar things. And perhaps it was to rebuke them that Lauchlan MacIntyre the shoemaker, a tall gaunt man of melancholy mien, pushed his way through and placed his fist on the table, the better to steady himself.

“A shame it is,” he said, in Gaelic that might have been fluent if it had not been interrupted by apprehensions of hiccough—“A shame it is—that we should be talking of such worldly matters. Ay, ay, indeed, when we should be mourning with our friend—mourning—as Rachel—mourning, and refusing to be comforted. It is this day that my heart is sore for Donald Maclean—that has seen the last of his family put away from him into the earth. A fine lass she was—ay, ay, indeed, not a handsomer in these islands—and a handy and a useful creature about the croft ; but we are as the grass that perisheth and the flower that withereth ; and Donald—Donald will be a sorrowful man—when he finds himself among the folk of Duntroone—so that the saying will be fulfilled

that was written : ‘ Sad is—the lowing—of a cow—on a strange pasture ’——”

He tilted forward : but he did not fall ; for a powerful pair of hands had got hold of him by the shoulders, and he was dragged away from the table, and thrown uncere- moniously into a corner. The elderly shep- herd, who had thus interfered, and who was about the only one of them with any remain- ing pretensions to sobriety, now addressed him with bitter scorn :

“ Yes, you are the fine man to have your wits and judgment in such a state. You do not know that it is Donald Maclean that we have been burying ; you do not know that his daughter is alive and well, and waiting for us outside in the cart ; you do not know it is she who is going to Duntroone. And you are the fine man to have the charge of her : sure I am you will be in a drunken sleep as soon as you get on board the steamer——”

“ Let be—let be,” said Lauchlan, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe. “ I am not for quarrelling. I am a peaceable man. Duncan, have you a match ? ”

“ A match ! ” exclaimed the other, with disdain. “ Is it nothing you can think of but whiskey and tobacco ?——”

“Whiskey?” repeated Lauchlan, with an amazing alertness. “Well, now, it is your head that has the good sense in it, Duncan, sometimes—and that is the Bible’s truth. And I say what you say; another good glass of whiskey will do us no harm, since we have to walk across the island to Kilree. Oh, yes, do not fear; I will look after the young lass and her father; I will take them safely to Duntroone. Have you a match, Duncan?”

The older man did not answer.

“It is I that must try to get a glass of milk for Barbara,” he said to himself, as he moved away, “if there is no oatcake in the house.”

But meanwhile Lauchlan—Long Lauchlan the shoemaker he was called in Duntroone on the mainland—Lauchie, while fumbling about for his pipe, had come upon a Jew’s-harp; and this was a new inspiration. With heroic endeavour he struggled to his feet; he balanced himself; he placed the instrument to his lips; and began to play, in a thin, quavering strain, ‘Lord Lovat’s Lament. Nay, he affected to give himself something of the airs of a piper; in the limited space at his command, he paced backwards and forwards, with slow and solemn steps; there

was an inward look on his face, as if he was forgetful, or disdainful, of these vain roysterers. Moreover, there was a kind of nebulous grandeur about the tall and melancholy figure; for since ever the peats had been put in the grate, the wind had been steadily blowing down the chimney, and now the apartment was thick with smoke—peat-smoke and tobacco-smoke combined; so that the performer, with his slow, funereal steps of about three inches in length, was as the dark ghost of a piper, moving to and fro unheeded and apart. And he might very well have been left to his harmless diversion; but that was not to be. In spite of the din, the tremulous, wiry sound of the Jew's-harp had caught the ear of a huge red-bearded drover from Mull who was on the other side of the table; and for some reason or another he became irritated.

“You there, Long Lauchlan,” he called, “why do you play that foolish thing? If the Free Church will not let you play the pipes, a man who is a man at all would refuse to play on any instrument! It is the great piper you are—with a child's toy at your mouth!”

The piper—or harper, rather—paused,

advanced to the table, steadied himself, and fixed his gaze on his enemy.

“What—is it you say—about the Free Church?” he demanded, with his small black eyes beginning to glitter.

“This it is I am saying,” responded the big red-bearded giant, with his brows lowering ominously, “that when the Free Church will be for putting down the pipes throughout the islands, then the man is not a man, but a dog every inch of him, who will give up the pipes and take in the place of the pipes what is allowed him, and that is the low, pitiful, vile toy-instrument you have there.”

“Then you are a liar,” said the shoemaker, with decision.

“I am a liar?” repeated the other, in an access of fury. “But you are worse, for you are a son of the devil and a liar besides—and I will smash your d——d Free Church toy!”

He made a sudden snatch across the table, caught the Jew’s-harp out of the shoemaker’s hand, and dashed it on the floor, dancing on it with his heavy-nailed boots. Then the tumult began. The shoemaker would get round the table. His friends held him back.

He broke away, with imprecations, and howls of rage. The drover—Red Murdoch—equally frantic, was desperately striving to dispossess himself of those who clung to him or who bravely interposed themselves between the two combatants; while random blows on both sides did nothing worse, so far, than beat the air. But what portended evil was that the angry passions thus aroused showed a tendency to become general. There were excited cries and remonstrances—the invariable prelude of a faction fight. And then, as it chanced, by some accidental swaying of the crowd, the table went over—went over with a *breege* fit to wake the dead: the tray, the glasses, the measures, the unnecessary water-bottle hurling themselves into the little black fire-place.

It was in the midst of all this indescribable uproar that a new figure suddenly appeared on the scene—an old woman with unkempt silver-white locks and visage of terrible import. She came in quickly; she was armed with the rolling-pin she had been using at the bake-board; and with some strange sort of instinct she seemed to make straight for the two chief offenders.

“What is this, now,” she exclaimed, in

shrill Gaelic, "what is this going on, and my daughter lying ill! Out with you, you drunken savages! Out of the house with you, you heathen crew!—ay, every one of you!—out of the house with you!—out!—out!—" And these panting ejaculations were accompanied by strokes so energetic and unexpected that a universal bewilderment and confusion instantly prevailed. No man's person, nor any part of it, however inferior, was safe from this merciless weapon; though it was mainly on the Mull drover and on the astonished shoemaker that her valiant belabouring fell.

"In the name of God, woman, have peace!" cried one of them.

But there was no peace—there was war—war implacable and ferocious—war that ended in a decisive victory; for in an incredibly short space of time she had driven forth the whole invertebrate crowd of them, and slammed to the outer door. They found themselves in the rain, they hardly knew how or why. They regarded each other, as if something had occurred, that they were trying to recollect. Then their eyes fell upon the cart. The young lass was still patiently waiting there, the thick blue-green

shawl not entirely confining the tags of raven-black hair that had been loosened by the storm. And then Duncan the shepherd—choosing to ignore this wild thing that had just happened—said discreetly :

“We’d better be getting on, lads. It would be a great pity if we were to miss the *Sanda*.”

They now followed the road that cut across the island ; and a dismal road it was—leading through sombre wastes of swampy peat-moss and half-frozen tarns ; with rarely a symptom of life anywhere, except the occasional clanging-by overhead of a string of wild-swans on their way to the western seas. But at any rate the rain had stopped ; and the wind, instead of being dead ahead, was now on their quarter, as a sailor might say ; so that they made very good progress—Lauchie the shoemaker clinging on to the tail-end of the cart, and talking to himself the while.

As the day waned, of a sudden they encountered the strangest sound—a long-protracted wail that rose and fell, as if it were some spirit of the dusk in immeasurable pain.

“May the Good Being save us, but what

is that!" was the pious ejaculation of one of the company.

Lauchie, holding on to the cart, and still talking to himself, laughed and chuckled.

"Oh, you are the clever boys, and no mistake!" he said, without looking at them. "You are the clever ones, that would squeeze paraffin oil out of the peat; and you would make your own sheep-dip; and you would write to the Queen complaining of the Commission and the rents. And yet you do not know the new steam-whistle—you have never heard the siren steam-whistle before—and the *Sanda* has given you a splendid fright!—"

"The *Sanda*!" exclaimed a neighbour in dismay, and inadvertently he relapsed into English. "Is she *unn*?"

"Ay, she's *unn*," responded Lauchie, giggling to himself, "and very soon she'll be off again, and we'll hef to tek Barbara Maclean ahl the weh back to Knockalanish."

But this dire threat stimulated them; they pushed ahead, and urged on the ancient animal in the shafts; and ere long they came in sight of the eastern shores of the island—with the strip of cottages called

Kilree—the bay—the rude quay and landing-slip—and, lying some few hundred yards out, a stumpy one-funnelled steamer that was again sending forth its alarming call. And was not yonder the last boat already left? They waved their plaids; they whistled; some of them ran—and one of them fell, and picked himself up again. The end of it was that the horse and cart were stopped at the top of the beach; the young lass was helped to descend; the foremost two or three of the company, hurrying along, had become possessed of a boat lying by the slip; and when Barbara Maclean and her modest bundle had been deposited in the stern, the promiscuous crew unloosed the painter, shoved off the bow, plunged their oars into the water, and proceeded to pull away with a desperate resolution to overtake the departing steamer.

They pulled and they pulled and they pulled; and they were men of strength and sinew; the oars creaked and groaned in the thole-pins. They tugged and they strained and they splashed—heads down and teeth clenched; they put their shoulders into the work with a will; they would have cheered but that they dared not waste their breath;

and again came a long howl from the *Sanda* to encourage them—doubtless she had perceived them through the gathering dusk, and might be disposed to grant them a few moments of grace.

But at this moment an appalling thing occurred. Long Lauchie the shoemaker, who had roused himself from his placid acquiescence of the last hour or two, and was now madly and heroically pulling stroke, chanced to raise his head—and behold there was some phantasmal object confronting his bleared eyes.

“Aw, God,” he cried, terror-stricken, “we have pulled the quay away with us!”

For there, undoubtedly, was the landing-slip, not a dozen yards off! And the beach, and the cottages—just above—were these also phantoms in the twilight? Surely they could not have hauled the whole island after them, out into the deep?

Then came one running down to the shore, gesticulating, shouting.

“There’s a line astern! The boat’s tied astern, man! Throw off the line!”

And at last it dawned upon Lauchie’s dimly-rotating brain that the boat must have been moored both fore and aft alongside the

slip—that they had only released the painter at the bow—and that all their frantic pulling had gone for nothing : in point of fact they had not moved a yard beyond the length of this still attaching line. So blindly and mechanically he undid the rope from the iron ring, and cast it into the water ; then he resumed his place and his strenuous work—this time with considerably less weight dragging behind. And in due course they reached the steamer ; the young lass, Long Lauchie, and Red Murdoch from Mull got on board ; the others returned with the boat to the shore. And thus it was that Barbara Maclean left her native island to seek a home among her relatives in Duntroone.

CHAPTER II.

A POOR STUDENT.

THE aunt of this Barbara Maclean kept a tobacconist's shop in Campbell Street, which is the main thoroughfare in the small sea-side town of Duntroone; and one evening Mrs. Maclean and her daughter Jess were seated in the parlour behind the shop, from which, through a window in the intervening door, they could observe when any customer entered. Mrs. Maclean was a spruce and trim little body, fresh-complexioned, grey-haired, and bright and alert of look; her daughter Jessie, or Jess as she was called by her intimates, was a young woman of about twenty, flaxen-haired and freckled, of pleasant features and expression, and with grey eyes, ordinarily tranquil and kindly, that could on occasion show themselves merry and humorous enough, not to say malicious.

For the rest, this was quite a snug and cheerful apartment on so cold a night; a brisk coal-fire was burning in the grate; a kettle simmered on the hob; and there were tea-things on the table.

“Ay,” said the little Highland widow, as she continued busy with her knitting-needles, “it’s a sad thing for a young lass to be left dissolute in the world——”

“Desolate, mother!” Jess said, impatiently, for her mother’s happy carelessness of speech was at times a source of considerable embarrassment when neighbours were about.

“Ay, jist that,” the widow said, contentedly, “it’s a sad thing for a young lass to be left dissolute. But it’s no so bad when she has friends to turn to; and I’m sure when Barbara Maclean comes to us, there will not be a pennyworth of grudging in her welcome. No, no, my sister and me we had our quarrels in the old days; but my sister’s lass will not want for a shelter while I have four walls round me and a fire to warm my hands. And I would not wonder if she took kindly to the ways of living here. She’ll find a difference between Knockalanish and Duntroone, in the living and the housing.

For well you know, Jess, it's not me that's given to the over-praising of creature comforts; still, at the same time, I like what is Christian; and I say that having cattle and human beings under the same roof is not Christian. It may be very healthy; but it is not Christian. And never will I forget the fortnight I spent at Knockalanish when my sister was in her last illness; the damp and the cold; the peats soaked through with the snow; the supper of mashed potatoes and milk; and the breathing of the cows in the night. For of course my sister had the ben * of the house; and the rest of us we had to put up with what beds and screens we could get; and night after night I was lying awake, fearing to hear the tick of the death-watch, or the howling of a dog, and it was the breathing of the cows you could hear, and not so far away. Ay. And Donald Maclean he was never the good manager, nor my poor sister either, but after her death he lost heart altogether, and how he was getting the rent, or whether there was more and more of debt, no one could tell; only this I am sure of, that when his daughter Barbara comes to us, she will not

* The inner apartment.

bring with her anything more than what she stands up in——”

At this moment some one entered the shop, and Jess hurried away to attend. It was a clerkly-looking youth, who wanted a brier-root pipe; and very particular he was; but at length he was satisfied; whereupon Jess returned to the parlour.

“Then there’s the lad Allan,” continued the warm-hearted little widow, still busy with her knitting. “Well, now, I am glad that he sometimes looks in of an evening; and he is one the more to show to Barbara that she has come among her own kith and kin, though his mother married a Lowlander and he has partly a Lowland name. But this is it now, Jess, my lass, that when he stays to supper I wish you would be pressing a little more on him—yes, yes—I wish you would be pressing a little more on him——”

Jessie Maclean’s fair face flushed somewhat.

“Allan Henderson is very proud, mother,” she said. “And if he suspected anything he would never come back.”

“Pride and an empty stomach,” said the small dame, sententiously, “are not even

cousins twenty times removed. Starvation is the worst of training for any one, I do not care who he is ; and the young man is foolish who refuses when there is plenty before him on the table. But I have heard of Allan and his ways ; oh, yes, indeed : both his father and his mother have told me ; that when he was at the College at Glasgow he was costing them nothing—well, next to nothing beyond the fees for the classes, and the books, and a lodging ; and now he is paying back, and paying back, though they are not asking for anything, and the post-offus keeping them very comfortable now, and I dare say he has paid them far more than ever they lent him. Besides,” she went on, “it’s a poor trade the schoolmastering. It’s very little the School Board give him, after his hard work at the classes. And my heart is sore to see a young man going about at this time of the year without an overcoat—when it’s I myself would gladly buy him one—and why should he not take it as a present, from his mother’s cousin——”

The flush on the girl’s face had deepened : she turned to trim the fire by way of hiding her vexation.

“You could not do that, mother!” she

exclaimed, in a low voice. "You would not insult him?—and turn him away from the house?—when he has not too many friends. And as for schoolmastering," she continued, raising her head—and at times speaking with an involuntary tremor of pride in her tones, "he may not be always a schoolmaster, though there are many schoolmasters that are great and famous men, at the large schools throughout the country. But if Allan is only a poor schoolmaster at present, it will not be always so, you may take my word for that. Of course he has not told me his plans and his hopes—why should he?—I think he is too shy to tell them to anyone; but I can see what he is; I can see what there is in him; and I know this, mother, that many a long day hence, you and I will be wondering that the Allan Henderson they are all talking of in London used to come into our parlour in Duntroone and smoke his pipe of an evening. It may be a long time yet; but it will be a great day for us—even if he has no recollection of us; and you'll bear me out, mother, that I prophesied it——" Some slight noise arrested her attention, and she looked up. "Mercy on us, here's Allan himself!" she ejaculated, in an undertone; and therewith

she rose to open the door for him—the colour not yet quite gone from her face.

He was a tall young man of about three or four-and-twenty, his figure slim and spare but well-knit, his head bent forward slightly, his features distinctly ascetic, yet with plenty of firmness about the lines of his mouth, his forehead square and capable, and showing a premature line or two, no doubt the result of hard and perhaps injudicious study. But it was his eyes that chiefly claimed attention : large, soft, brown eyes, that were usually contemplative and absent, but that could become singularly penetrating when his attention was challenged. It was a concentration, in obedience to any such summons, that appeared to demand some brief effort ; but his perceptions, once aroused, were swift ; he seemed instantly to divine whether this person or this utterance was worth heeding or to be turned away from with indifference and contempt. Jess used laughingly to say of him, when she was grown spiteful—

“Poor Allan, the matter with him is that there’s a cloud betwixt him and all the world around him ; and when you think he is looking over to Lismore, or to Morven, or Kinnairloch, it’s the cloud he’s staring at, and

the grand things he sees there—Roman battles, and such like, I suppose. And some day he will be staring at the fine things before him, and he'll step over the end of the quay, and that will be the last of poor Allan!" And she would continue her flouting: "Going on for four-and-twenty, and as big a baby as ever he was in his childhood! He has not got accustomed to anything! Everything is new to him—and everything wonderful—if he comes on a fox-glove growing in the woods—or watches a young foal following its mother—or he'll pick up a shell from the shore, and that's quite enough to stare at and wonder at too! And what he gets to laugh at, passes me!—he'll burst out laughing when there was no amusement intended at all, and that is not pleasant to people's feelings; or again, when the young folk are a little merry, and mocking at each other, he will sit as glum as if he was looking at his own funeral going by. Temper?—temper, indeed!—he is the worst-tempered young man in Duntroone!"

Yet the visitor who now came in did not look as if he had an evil temper; rather he seemed diffident as he took the seat that the widow cheerfully offered him.

“I was passing,” said he, by way of apology, “and I thought I would step in to ask if you had heard of your niece. Do you know if the *Sanda* was able to call at Kilree?—the weather has been bad out there.”

“Well, it’s little I am likely to hear,” responded the widow, “until Barbara and Lauchlan MacIntyre walk straight into the shop, or come knocking at the door of the house; though maybe some one will run up from the quay to tell us when the *Sanda* shows round the point. There’s Tobermory, to be sure, and they might have telegraphed from Tobermory; but dear me, what does that poor lass understand about the telegraph? and Lauchlan—well, Lauchlan would be amongst his friends. And yet I was cautioning him too. ‘Lauchie,’ I was saying to him, ‘this time at least it is absolutely comparative that you keep a hold on yourself, and behave yourself at the funeral, and in bringing away the lass.’ And he was saying ‘Yes, yes, mistress,’ again and again. But I have had experience of Lauchie, that is a good enough man and a sensible man until the whiskey gets over him; and when he begins laughing, then it’s a sign you need not try to talk any more to him; and afterwards,

when he comes out of it and is sober again, oh, the poor, down-hearted crayture that he is!—as if he had committed every sin in the Catalogue——”

“You mean the Decalogue, mother!” Jess remonstrated.

“Ay: sometimes they say the one and sometimes the other,” the widow went on, with blithe effrontery. “But I’m thinking the *Sanda* should be in ere long now; and there’s a bit supper waiting over the way; and it would be very agreeable to us, Allan, if you would step across with us, when the shop is shut, and take your place at the table, to show Barbara that she has come amongst several friends——”

But he seemed to shrink back from this proposal.

“No, no, thanks to you all the same,” he said—and he had a grave, gentle, impressive voice, that Jess listened to as if every word were of value. “When a girl comes to a new home in this way, surely she would rather be with her own people, and have no half-strangers to meet. Afterwards there will be plenty of time for her to make acquaintances.”

“And it is very ill done of you, Allan

Henderson," said the little widow, boldly and indignantly, "to speak of yourself as a stranger, or half-stranger, in my house. Perhaps these are the ways they have at the College; but I am not understanding such ways. Jess, she must be for ever making excuses; and it's this one's pride, and that one's pride; but I am not understanding such pride when there is the family-relationship between us. Oh, yes, every one has heard of the old saying about the Macleans and their pride and their poverty; 'Though I am poor, I am well-born; God be thanked I am a Maclean!' But where is the place for such things between cousins? And when you know very well, Allan, that over the way, and every night in the week, there is a place at the table for you, and Jessie and me sitting by ourselves, and perhaps you alone in your lodgings, and maybe without a fire, too—for I have heard of such things with young men eager to get on in the world—well, then, it may be College manners for you to stay away, but it is not good Highland manners. And that is the truth I am telling you at last."

Jess Maclean looked apprehensive and troubled; but the young man took all this in good part.

“One is not always one’s own master,” he answered, quietly. “I can only give you my best thanks for so kindly asking me. And I am sure you know another old saying: ‘If a man cannot get to his own country, it is a good thing to be in sight of it’?”

“Will you not light your pipe now, Allan?” Jess put in skilfully—to get away from a ticklish subject.

But at this suggestion, Mrs. Maclean, who had been regarding the young man (perhaps with some little compunction, for she was not accustomed to scold) quickly rose from her seat and left the room, disappearing into the front shop, and evidently bent on some errand.

“I hope you are not vexed with my mother, Allan,” said Jess, at once.

“Oh, no, indeed,” he made answer. “Every one knows that she is the kindest of women. And when your cousin comes from the islands, she will soon find that she is in a friendly home.”

Presently Mrs. Maclean reappeared, bringing with her an unopened tin canister.

“This is a new mixture, Allan,” said she, as she placed the box before the young man, “that has been sent me from Glasgow, and

I would be glad if you would take the canister home with you, and try the mixture, and tell me your opinion, so that I could be advising my customers when they come in. Will you put it in your pocket, or will I send Christina along with it to you in the morning?"

Jess looked swiftly and in alarm from one to the other of them. But if his stubborn Scotch independence prompted him to refuse the gift, the Highland blood that also flowed in his veins forbade that the refusal should be in any way discourteous. He hesitated for a second—to find some excuse; and there was some colour of embarrassment visible on his forehead.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Maclean," said he, after this involuntary pause. "But—but I have been thinking of giving up my pipe altogether."

And now the anxiety of the younger woman gave place to an infinite distress and pity: was he—simply because he had been driven into a corner, and found himself unable to refuse in any other manner this proffered kindness—was he going to deprive himself of the chief, perhaps the only, comfort of a poor and solitary student?

But at this moment her attention was

distracted. Some one entered the shop, and approached the dividing door; and a glance through the half-curtained pane told her who this was—this was Mr. Peter McFadyen, coal merchant and town-councillor. She rose to receive the new visitor: but she did so with impatient anger in her heart: for she knew that now in a very few minutes the proud and contemptuous Allan would be on his homeward way.

CHAPTER III.

SIGNALS OF DISTRESS.

YET Peter McFadyen himself was about the last man in the world to imagine that he could be unwelcome anywhere; and as he now, after salutations and inquiries, proceeded to make himself comfortable in front of the fire—pulling out his pipe and tobacco-pouch the while—he went on to give these neighbours a vivid account of his day's doings on the golf-links, nothing doubting of their sympathy and keen interest. He was a little man, round and chubby, with eager, twinkling eyes, a clipped sandy-brown beard, and hair becoming conspicuously scant on the top. For the rest, the rumour in Duntroone was that McFadyen, who was an old bachelor, had it in view to amalgamate his fortunes with those of the widow;

but some there were who surmised that Peter cherished other and more romantic designs.

“Dod,” he said, with a triumphant chuckle, “I’m thinking the station-master and me we were showing the young fellows something this afternoon! Not that I would call either Mr. Gilmour or myself elderly folk——”

“Indeed, Mr. McFadyen,” said the widow, politely, “it will be many a long day before you can think of such a thing.”

“A few years one way or the other is nothing at all,” responded Mr. McFadyen, with obvious satisfaction. “Just nothing at all! It is a question of keeping yourself in good fettle; and if one of they young fellows and myself were to start away from Taynuilt, I wonder which of us would be the first to reach the top of Cruachan Ben. Ay, or throwing the hammer: that is a capital test of what is in a man’s shoulders; and I should not be afraid of a match with some of them—not me! I’ve got a practising-place marked out in the backyard—though it’s rather narrow—and if anybody was a bit careless, the hammer would make a fearfu’ smash of the little greenhouse——”

“Did I ever thank you for the christmas-anthemums, Mr. McFadyen?” the widow interposed. “They were just beautiful—though Jessie was sorry you should be cutting them——”

But Peter was not to be diverted from vaunting his physical prowess.

“Running—jumping—pulling an oar,” he continued, with buoyant assurance (and perhaps widening out his chest a little, for he must have known that Jessie Maclean’s ‘grey eyes feminine’ were now regarding him) “give me a week or two’s training, and I’m not afraid of any of they boasting young chaps. But it’s the links, Mrs. Maclean, it’s the links I was coming to; and we did well there this afternoon, I can tell you! We did well, both Gilmour and me; but I beat him—the fact is, Gilmour is a little thing stiff in the joints, though he doesna like to hear it said. Well, we started from the teeing-ground just behind the Dunchoillie farm; and you know Colquhoun’s meadow, Mrs. Maclean, there’s a burn comes down through the middle, and then there’s a bank covered with whin-bushes: it’s just a desperate bunker to get into. Very well: I put the ball on the tee—a little

sand; not too much sand; too much sand's a great mistake—and I let drive! Dod, that was a drive! Away she went with a ping like a rifle-bullet—sailing and sailing—sailing and sailing—and getting smaller and smaller—until my eyes were filled wi' water staring against the white clouds—and Gilmour he lost sight of the ball altogether. 'It's down in the whins!' he cries. 'Ye gomeril,' I answers him, 'it's more near the putting-green, if not close up to the hole!'—for I was just certain I had got far away over the burn and the whins, and was safe on to the higher land. Would you believe it?—when we got up, the ball was within twenty yards of the flag; and in three more strokes I was out; the first hole for four!—and me that never touched a golf-club until last summer!"

Peter had been growing excited: he now moderated his warmth.

"I did not do so well at the second hole," he observed darkly. "Maybe it was the wind; or maybe I toed the ball when I was driving from the tee; anyway it got over the dyke and into the road, ay, and into the cart-rut, and I thought I was never going to get it over the dyke again. Bother

the thing, I smashed my iron niblick clean in two—but—but I'm thinking there must have been a flaw in the wood——”

He hastened away from these deplorable reminiscences.

“The Pinnacle!” he said, laughing with eager anticipation. “We had a rare game at the Pinnacle! For that’s a most desperate place, Mrs. Maclean, and no mistake—as steep as the side of a house—and all soomin with water—and unless you get clear away on to the top, what happens is that your ball strikes the face of the hill, and doesna lie there, but just comes quietly trintle, trintle, trintling down the slope and back to your feet again. And there was I up on the top—right up on the putting-green, after a fine long drive—looking down on Gilmour; and I declare there never was such an angry man!—hacking away with his cleek—splashing the mud—and sweerin’ every time the ball would come trintle, trintling back down to his feet. ‘Gilmour,’ I cries to him, ‘put the ball in your pocket, man, and bring it up with ye: it’s the only way at the Pinnacle!’ And he would not speak, so angry he was; and still angrier was he when we started away for the next hole; for he forgot it was blowing up

there on the top—blowing right across from Mull and Morven and the Frith of Lorn; and he put far too much sand on the tee—far too much sand, for he's an obstinate man, Gilmour, and will not take a telling—and in his anger he made a drive that should have sent the ball over to Lismore! Did it?" Peter asked—and he roared with laughter, and his small eyes twinkled, and he rubbed his hands. "There was just a blash of sand!—a blash of sand—that rose in the air—and back it came in his face—just filling his eyes, and filling his mouth, so that he went about splutterin', and could not even sweer! Dod, the station-master was an angry man this afternoon!—it's a fearfu' place the Pinnacle!"

At this point the tall and grave young schoolmaster rose to go, notwithstanding a half-concealed deprecatory glance from Jess.

"Allan, my lad," said Mr. McFadyen, familiarly, "have you heard of the dance that Mr. and Mrs. McAskill of the Argyll Arms are going to give to the Gaelic Choir?"

"No," said the schoolmaster, somewhat curtly.

"Yes, indeed, then," continued Peter, with

much importance. "In the Volunteer Drill-Hall. A great affair, for the Choir will sing glees between the dances, and there'll be plenty of pipers. And sure I am that every one in this room at this minute will have an invite; and I have been thinking, Mrs. Maclean, that if you would let me call for you and Miss Jessie, I would bring a machine and drive you up to the Drill-Hall, for it's a bad road in the dark, and it would never do for you and Miss Jessie to get your feet wet——"

"Mr. McFadyen," said Jess, with some touch of resentment, "I think you are forgetting what has just happened in our family——"

"Oh, but the dance is a long way off yet!" said Peter. And then he went on, with humorous shyness: "Maybe, if any one should have a doubt about going, maybe that one's myself: maybe they'll be saying that my dancing days should be over——"

"And who could be saying that!" interposed the widow, promptly. "That would be nonsense indeed! I should not wonder, now, if you could give lessons to some of those young lads and lasses."

He turned to her with sudden seriousness.

“If there’s one thing surer than another, Mrs. Maclean,” he said, “it’s this—that a well-trained step is never forgotten. Begin well—that’s everything in dancing; and ye acquire a grace—an elegance, I might say—that becomes a kind of second nature. Not that I object to a rough-and-tumble reel now and again; no, no; I’m not more afraid of a foursome reel than I am of a foursome round on the links. But there’s something finer.—Miss Jessie, do you know the Varsoviana?”

“I have seen it,” Jess Maclean answered, coldly.

“But it’s the simplest thing—the simplest thing in the world!” he vehemently urged. “Just stand up for a minute, now, and I’ll show ye——”

He himself got up, put his toes into the first position, and held out his hand to encourage her. But she declined to move.

“If you please, I would rather not, Mr. McFadyen,” she said, with flushed face.

“But look!” said he. And therewith, whistling an air with pursed lips, he proceeded to execute certain short, stiff, marionette-like movements, as well as he could in the circumscribed space at his disposal.

“D’you see now?—as simple as simple!—

then lead off with the next foot—the other foot at every turn—d’ye see how simple it is?—and the most elegant thing that ever was seen, with a lot of couples in a ball-room.” He ceased from these valorous efforts, and resumed his chair, proud, breathless, and happy. “We’ll get you to have a try at it some other evening, Miss Jessie,” said he, gaily. “I’m thinking we’ll be able to show them something the night of Mrs. McAskill’s dance !”

Allan Henderson had been waiting patiently, not wishing to interrupt.

“I will bid you good-evening now, Mrs. Maclean,” said he.

“Good-night, Allan,” she made answer, holding out her hand.

But Jess followed him into the front shop, shutting the door behind her.

“I am sorry if Mr. McFadyen and his blethers have driven you away, Allan : you do not come to see us as much as you might.”

“I must get home to my books,” he answered her, evasively.

“And I hope, Allan,” she said, regarding him with anxious and earnest eyes, “that you are not working too hard at your studies.”

“Well,” said he, “when one is young one

must work hard. It is the only time : there is no after time. But I'll be looking in to see you and your mother again one of these evenings. Good-night, Jessie."

"Good-night, Allan!" said she ; and when he had gone, she lingered a while : she did not care to return at once to the parlour, where doubtless Mr. McFadyen was still engaged in magnifying his strength, his agility, and innumerable accomplishments.

On the other hand, Allan, when he left the tobacconist's shop, did not immediately return to his lodging and his books. He was at an age, and in circumstances, that imperatively demanded close and strenuous self-communion ; and that he was accustomed to seek in solitary walks along the seashore, or up on the moorland wastes, especially at night, when darkness and silence were abroad. And tumultuous indeed were the problems he found confronting him in these lonely rambles. There were deep and inscrutable searchings of heart, for no matter what his training and his traditions may have been, he was resolute and uncompromising in his search after such truth as might be discoverable—about human nature, and the surroundings of human nature, and the more awful

mysteries beyond; there were ambitious projects springing thick from an over-active brain—elusive, distracting phantoms that just as often as not beat wild wings against the *res angusta domi*; the *res angusta domi* itself came in with its sordid cares and pinchings—the need of a pair of weather-proof boots—the counting the cost of a holiday-trip to see his father and mother, who kept the post-office at Inverblair—this latest project of giving up tobacco—and the like; while ever-recurrent were the vague and harassing visions of youth—that troubled questioning of the future, with all its tantalising hopes, its looming anxieties, its hidden dangers and pitfalls. But happily for him, in this seething-time, in this time of storm and stress, he had been spared the crowning misery of all. The ‘cruel madness of love’ had not overtaken him: that honeyed poison-cup at all events had not been placed to his lips.

He passed through the now half-dormant town, went round the obscure and silent quays, ascended a steep incline, and eventually, emerging from the black shadow of some larches, stepped out upon a little plateau on the summit of the Gallows Hill. It was

a favourite resort of his: here he could pace up and down, exorcising the demons of unrest and doubt and despondency, and bidding the great surrounding mountains lend some little measure of their invulnerable calm. On this particular night, it is true, the darkness was such that nothing was visible of all those vast mountain-ranges; but well he knew the whereabouts of the mighty peaks and shoulders, from Ben Buie and Creachbeinn and Dun-da-gu, over in Mull, to Glashven and Fuar Bheinn up in Morven, from the far giants of Glencoe, murmuring to each other across the silence of the valleys, round to Ben Cruachan and Ben Eunaich, above the lonely and ghostly solitudes of Glen-strae. August companions, to be sure, even if unseen; they appeared to lift the soul away from the trivial tasks and frettings of everyday life; these he seemed for the moment to have left behind him—down in yonder little town, that he could now make out only by certain glow-worm dots scattered here and there, indicating the semicircular sweep of the bay.

Of a sudden his eyes were attracted elsewhere. Far away at the back of Kerrara island a white shaft of fire had sprung into

the mirk of the night—a distant, trembling, curving, silent thing that glared for a second or so, and then vanished, leaving the darkness as impenetrable as before. And for a moment he asked himself whether the Mull people—the people down about Duart—were setting off fireworks. But what occasion could there be for fireworks? The next instant another slender white shaft rose silent into the air; and now, judging by the position of the Lismore light—the one steady, radiant star in all this wide, black picture—these signals seemed to be coming from some point between Lismore and Mull. But signals?—not fireworks at all? And if signals, then signals from some vessels in distress? And what vessel was now expected, except the *Sanda*, that was bringing to the household of the Macleans the young girl from the outer isles?

He sped away down the hill-side and gained the dusky thoroughfares. The few people about had not noticed the signals—perhaps the northern end of Kerrara island had prevented their being seen. But soon there was sufficient commotion in the little town; and one old sailor, hurrying along with his companions to a commanding point, to discover

what had happened or was happening, was heard to say to himself—

“The *Sanda*? But the *Sanda* would be coming over from Craigenure? And how the duffle could she get so far down to the west?”

CHAPTER IV.

ON A ROCK.

Now when the *Sanda* left Craigenure, Long Lauchlan the shoemaker was down in the fore-cabin, snugly huddled up in a corner; and he was nursing a soda-water bottle half-filled with whiskey, while he softly sang to himself. It was not a lugubrious song; but lugubriously and slowly he sang it, especially the refrain—

*‘ If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk with me anywhere ’*

the *a*’s in which he pronounced as the *a* in *dark*, dwelling on them indefinitely. Red Murdoch the Mull drover, who had been having a royal time of it since these two left Kilree, and who chanced to be the only other occupant of the cabin, at length interrupted angrily.

“To the devil with your south-country songs!” he cried, in Gaelic.

But the long, melancholy-visaged shoemaker took no offence; he was too happy.

“It’s a beautiful song—a beautiful song,” he said, also in Gaelic. “And if it is a south-country song, it is a song that is known to every fisherman from Peterhead to Buckie. There is no more favourite song.” He raised his forefinger, to beat the slow time. “A beautiful song—

*‘It’s I will buy you a pennyworth of preens,
If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk with me anywhere.’”*

“The man is a fool that would sing such a song!” said the red-bearded drover, bluntly.

Whereupon Lauchie laughed and chuckled quietly to himself.

“Oh, yes, I may be a fool. But I would rather be a fool than a man with bad luck.”

“Who is a man with bad luck?” demanded Murdoch, his bushy eyebrows drawing together.

Lauchie appeared to be secretly amused.

“Then you do not know you are of the same name with the man of bad luck?” he went on. “Oh, you do not know what they

say of the luck of Red Murdoch? They say to any one 'You have the luck of Red Murdoch; for when Red Murdoch is in the north, then the herring are in the south.'"

"If I knew the man that said that of me," rejoined Murdoch, with fiery eyes—and he even thrust forth a massive and hairy fist, clenched, to give emphasis to his threat, "I would bash his head against a stone wall."

"Have a dram, Murdoch," said Lauchie, tendering the bottle, which was not refused. "It's not I that am going out of the house to-night, no, not to fight anyone. I am a peaceable person. Better a warm fireside than a cold hill-side, that is what the wise man of Ross was saying. Murdoch," he continued, suddenly reverting to the blissful days that were now nearing an end, "it was a beautiful funeral. That is what I am thinking. It was a beautiful funeral. There was no parsimony. How many gallons of whiskey, would you say?—seven?—ay, ay, and maybe more like seven and a half. There was two or three glasses apiece when we came together; and there was two more at the house; well, that was right and proper; and although it is not easy for eight men to keep in step, when they have

a heavy coffin on their shoulders, there was not a single man fell into the road, and each time the coffin was set down, it was set down as gently as if it were a cradle, not a coffin at all. And two more glasses to each man at the gate of the cemetery. And two more coming away. After that—aw, God, I am not remembering much—there was little use in counting—— but sure I am there was no parsimony; and it was the fine funeral that was given to Donald Maclean of Knockalanish. Have you a match, Murdoch?”

“I am tired of giving matches to a fool of a man that will not carry them for himself,” answered Red Murdoch, sulkily and tauntingly.

But Lauchie would not quarrel. He resignedly put his pipe in his pocket again; he settled himself in a corner, his head drooping somewhat; and he resumed his placid and happy communing with himself.

“A beautiful song—not a fisherman from Peterhead to Buckie but knows it—a beautiful song—

*‘It’s I will buy you a braw new gown,
With buttons so fine, and flounces to the ground,
If ye’ll waak,
If ye’ll waak,
If ye’ll waak with me anywhere.’*

A beautiful song. . . . And a beautiful funeral . . . no parsimony at all——”

Then his head fell wholly: he was fast asleep. Red Murdoch glanced at him with angry scorn; threw a parting oath at him; and turned to leave the cabin. And this he managed, after several efforts—for the steps of the companion were narrow and exceedingly steep—to do: hands, knees, and feet were all brought into requisition; and eventually he emerged into the upper air.

Meanwhile what had become of the young lass from the outer isles whom these two worthies were convoying to Duntroone? Once or twice she had been invited to go down into the fore-cabin; but she had refused—for the odour of the place was overpowering; she preferred to remain on deck; and the steward had considerably brought her some tea and some food. She had got into a more or less sheltered place well away forward; and there she sate with her tartan shawl drawn close around her, silent and solitary, and half-terrified by the strange things around her. For she had never been on a steamer before; and although the monotony of the long voyage had produced a state of semi-stupefaction, she

remained nervously alive to all her surroundings—to the throbbing of the screw, the lash of the waves along the vessel's side, and the dusky figures moving about the deck. The night was obscure and squally; but at least there was no rain; and the high bulwarks were a sort of protection to her against the hurling gusts of wind.

Now there had come on board at Craigenure two gentlemen who were returning home to Duntroone—one of them, indeed, the principal doctor there, the other a well-known bailie; and these two had wandered up to the bow of the ship to look around them; and they were chatting to each other. Barbara Maclean heard every word.

“Surely we're keeping a long way from Lismore, Bailie,” the Doctor said, regarding the steady and golden ray of the lighthouse that was shining boldly through the mirk of the night. “I wonder how many times I have crossed from Craigenure and yet I never saw a course like this taken before.”

“Maybe Pattison is trying to cheat the tide,” replied the Bailie. “There's fearful tides running here at times.”

“Well, Captain Pattison should know his own business best,” the Doctor was saying—

when of a sudden he gripped his companion's arm. "What's that there—right ahead!" he exclaimed, staring with amazement and consternation at some vague, half-invisible, dark object that seemed to loom up out of the water. And then again, instantly recognising what was about to happen, he called out—"It's the Lady Rock! For God's sake, man, hold on!—hold on to something!"—while he himself caught at the nearest portion of the standing rigging, and braced himself as best he might to withstand the coming crash.

There appeared to be no interval. Almost simultaneously with his shouted warning came the inevitable, the terrific shock that seemed to rive the ship from stem to stern; then she lurched forward and upward, with a hideous grinding sound; then she dipped somewhat; and then she hung—hung there for one dreadful second of silence, as if she were some dumb animal mutely asking what was next required of her—whether she should carry on some half-dozen yards farther, and, with smashed bows and started plates, go headlong to the bottom, in fifty fathoms of water. But no: she remained firm: and she remained upright, though

with a strong list to starboard; and now, after that one moment of paralysed silence and suspense, an indescribable clamour and commotion ensued—women shrieking and running hither and thither for their relatives, the sailors hurrying along with lanterns, the captain calling his orders from the bridge. And all through this bewilderment of noise and confusion there ran the ominous hoarse surge of the tide on the isolated rocks beneath and around them; it was as a voice out of the unseen; and it was a clamorous and an angry voice—a voice that threatened doom.

Barbara Maclean had been thrown violently on to the deck; but when she raised herself, she had no thought of rushing about, claiming protection and succour. Her faculties had been stunned and blunted by these terrors of the sea and of the night; and when she resumed her place, she only pulled her shawl around her, cowering, and perhaps crying a little in her helplessness. She knew nothing of what was going forward. She saw dark figures going quickly about with lanterns; but they did not chance to come near her; and even in that case she would have been too timid to put any

question. It is true, she did utter a brief cry of dismay when the first rocket, with a shrill and sudden scream, sprung high and blinding into the gloom; but in time she got used even to that; while the intermittent thunder of the signal-cannon only seemed to shake her frame physically. She was too dazed to feel further or acute alarm; what might happen would have to happen; she was far away from her own land, and from things with which she was familiar. As for the two men who had in a kind of fashion undertaken to see her safely to Duntroone, neither was of near relationship to her, and she could not expect much care from them; besides she knew the ways of people who had been to a Highland funeral out in the west; and she was content to remain unassisted and alone.

The odd thing was that in such a crisis of danger Red Murdoch should have thought first, not of this forlorn creature, but of his boon companion, with whom he was constantly quarrelling. He stumbled along to the fore-cabin; he steadied himself at the top of the companion; he howled aloud his warning; and then, finding there was no reply, he made his way—to speak plainly, he

fell—down the steps; he crossed the floor, and seized Lauchie MacIntyre by the coat-collar.

“Here, man, come away!—do you not understand?—we may all of us be at the bottom of the sea in a minute!—”

Lauchie endeavoured, but in a gentle manner, to repel this interference.

“No,” he said, slowly, but firmly, “I will not stir from the house this night. It is I that am knowing when I am well off. Go away yourself, Murdoch. It’s a warm house I am in; and a warm house is better than a cold hill-side——”

“Son of the Devil!” roared Murdoch, furiously. “Do you not know that we are on a rock?”

“And the house that is founded on a rock is a beautiful house,” said Lauchie, solemnly. “Have you a match, Murdoch?”

Murdoch did not answer, but now with both hands he seized the coat-collar of the shoemaker, and by main force dragged him to the foot of the companion. Then first he tried to shove him up the steps; next he tried to drag him up; presently they both fell together; and it is impossible to say what might have happened had not a sailor,

hearing some noise, come to the top of the companion, and called down—

“Uss there any one below there?”

“Yes, indeed,” called Murdoch in reply.

“Come here and give me a little assustance with a friend of mine, that uss rather too sleepy to go ashore by himself.”

The sailor came running down the companion; and fortunately he was a powerfully built man.

“Going ashore?” said he, grimly, as he proceeded to hoist and shoulder these two up the steps. “It’s miles aweh from any shore you are! And the sooner you are out of this boat the better: would you like to be left behind?”

For now it appeared that the captain had decided that the passengers, at least, should descend from the steamer, taking such precarious chance of safety as might be afforded by the solitary reef on which they had struck. The gangway was open; a ladder affixed; and by the dusky glare of two lamps woman after woman, and man after man, went down the side, to seek out for some footing among the wet and slippery seaweed and the hidden pools of salt water. They crowded together, these poor wretches, deafened by the rush

and roar of the tides all around them ; and perhaps wondering when those baleful forces would arise out of the dark and seize and engulf them. They dared hardly move, for a single false step might plunge them into unknown deeps ; and the lights of the steamer were dim. Those indeed were best off who could cling on to the massive iron bars of the beacon that marks the rock—a flameless skeleton of a structure that towered away above them into the sombre skies. And meanwhile, at intervals, from the deck of the ship, the rockets went screaming into the night, and the signal cannon boomed its reverberations across the waste of waves. But half-hour after half-hour went by, and there was no response.

“They can neither see nor hear us,” the Doctor said to his neighbour. “We are too far away for the sound to carry. And Kerrara lies between us and Duntroone : they will not see the rockets.”

“But surely the people at Lismore light must see them !” said the Bailie.

“Yes, indeed, that is possible. But they have no telegraph there.”

“No telegraph at the lighthouse ?” exclaimed the Bailie, indignantly. “Then it is

a monstrous and mischievous shame! A fine piece of economy! Who is responsible for that—the Board of Trade?” And then he added: “But at least they have a boat at the lighthouse?”

“Ay, but not a boat that would be of much use to us, across that driving sea.”

Nevertheless the captain was about to tempt those stormy waters, in hopes of obtaining assistance from the mainland. In the dull glow of the lamps, the shipwrecked crowd could perceive the boat being lowered from the side of the stranded vessel; presently the mate and two of the hands had got into it; and in a few minutes it had disappeared—into the mysterious surrounding chaos. There was no cheer raised as the boat departed; this small assemblage of folk, hardly visible to each other, and hardly to be distinguished from the blackness of the reef, was too dispirited and perturbed; Duntroone and the possibilities of help were miles away; while the dangers immediately encompassing them were pressing and near.

“When the tide rises, how many of us could clamber up and hold on to the beacon?” asked the Bailie of his companion.

Barbara Maclean heard this question put,

but did not divine its import. She was standing alone and friendless and helpless ; weeping silently ; her shawl not much of a protection now against the blasts of wind tearing across the exposed reef. She was benumbed with cold and misery ; not knowing what might happen : conscious, too, that all her little possessions — her chest, containing everything she owned in the world — had been left on board the steamer—the steamer that at any moment might slip forward and vanish from before their eyes, into fifty fathoms of ocean.

CHAPTER V.

THE *FIREFLY*.

WHEN the young schoolmaster, alarmed by those signals of distress that rose white and silent into the distant night, sped away down from the Gallows Hill, he made straight for the house of the agent of the Steam Packet Company.

“It may be the *Sanda*,” said the agent, at once hurrying off to get his overcoat and hat. “She’s hours late as it is. Anyway we must run out to see what is the matter; and luckily the *Firefly* lighter is lying at the quay: she’ll not be long in getting up steam.”

“Would you let me go with you, Mr. Stewart?” Allan asked.

“Why not? Why not? You’re the first to bring the news——”

“For there’s a young lass,” Allan explained, “coming by the *Sanda* from Kilree; she’s a niece of Mrs. Maclean in Campbell Street; and the Macleans would take it as a friendly thing if I went out to see if there was anything to be done for her——”

“Why not?” said the good-natured agent; and he took up his stick, which was his symbol of authority, and opened the door for himself and his companion.

“And would there be time for me to run round to Mrs. Maclean’s and get a few wraps and things of that kind?” continued Allan. “The night is cold.”

“Well, yes, if you are quick about it; but you must not keep me waiting,” said the agent, as he hastened away on his own errand, along the dark and wet sea-front.

It took the tall young schoolmaster but a minute or two to reach Mrs. Maclean’s house—the shop being now shut.

“And is the *Sanda* coming in at last?” cried the cheerful little widow. “And will there be time for Jessie and me to go down to meet Barbara?”

“Well, no,” said Allan, with a trifle of hesitation. “The *Sanda* is not in sight yet. But there’s a ship out there in some kind of

trouble ; and I'm going out with Mr. Stewart, in a lighter ; and I was thinking—if it was the *Sanda*—well, I might take a few things that might be of use to your niece, for the weather has been very wet and rough lately—”

At the mere suggestion that anything had happened, or might be happening, to the steamer bringing her niece Barbara to Duntroone, the widow became quite unnerved with fright ; and her anxious and irrelevant questions, to which there was no possible answer, were nothing but a stumbling-block in the way. It was Jess who was the helpful one—who instantly divined what was wanted. In the briefest space of time she had cleverly put together a serviceable bundle of shawls and wraps, to say nothing of a pair of mittens, a paper bag of sweet biscuits, and a flask of some innocent cordial. And with these things he was speeding away—indeed, he had got well down the staircase—when at the last moment Jess called to him again.

“ Allan !—Allan ! ”

He looked up. She came running down the stone steps (for the Macleans lived in a small tenement of flats) and by the uncertain light he saw that she held something in her hand.

“If you are going out in the steamer,” said she, “will you not put this muffler round your neck? It may be a coarse night outside the bay.”

Well, he was loth to offend this gentle half-cousin of his; but still—still—there was something in the man’s nature that drove him to refuse.

“No, thank you, Jessie,” he said. “No, thank you—I am not afraid of the cold.”

“Oh,” said she, “if you will not take it because you think it is one of the things that women wear, then that is not very friendly. If I were you, I would not be so proud!”

The light in the stairway was dim; it was the tone of her voice that told him he had vexed her.

“Oh, then, I will take it,” he said, “and maybe it will be of use to your cousin Barbara.” And therewith he hurried off again, for he was anxious not to keep Mr. Stewart waiting.

As he passed along, it became apparent that the news had spread through the little town of something having happened to the *Sanda*—or perhaps some other vessel—outside; and when he reached the quay, there

was quite a group of folk, mostly superannuated fishermen, eagerly discussing the possibilities. The steam-lighter was ready to start; as soon as he got on board, the ropes were thrown off, the blades of the screw began to lash the water, and the high-bowed, unwieldy craft was soon moving crescent-wise out into the bay. And then, as she gathered speed, the dull orange points that told of the window-panes of Duntroone—along the shore and up on the hill-side—gradually receded; and ahead of them was a great black world of invisible mountain and sea and sky, with ever and always the solitary ray of Lismore lighthouse burning steadfast and clear.

“If the *Sanda's* engines have broken down over there,” said Mr. Stewart, “the mouth of the Sound of Mull is a bad place. There will be a strong ebb tide running, and she may drift just anywhere.”

“But the rockets I saw,” Allan made answer, “seemed all to rise from the same spot; and as far as I could make out, that would be over near the Lady Rock, or somewhere in that direction.”

“If Pattison has got the *Sanda* on to the Lady Rock,” observed the agent, “the sooner

he sends in his certificate to the Board of Trade the better. But it's not believable!—he's an experienced man——”

The remarkable thing, however, was that though they had by this time rounded Kerrara point, there was no sign of any vessel anywhere—no repetition of those swift white messengers that had attracted Allan Henderson's attention when he was on the top of the Gallows Hill. The night, it is true, was pitch-dark and squally, and there were occasional gusts of rain flying about; but all the same they were now out in the open, and a ship's rocket ought to have been visible a great distance off.

“Allan, lad,” said Mr. Stewart, “I hope you have not brought us on a wild-geese-chase.”

And Allan himself began to think back. His eyes could not have deceived him? He had never been subject to hallucinations, even when he was working hardest at his studies—with scant fuel for the engine. And surely there could be no mistake about his actually having beheld those long shafts of silvery fire spring into the black heavens?

“I think I wass seeing a light,” called the man who was peering over the bows,

“just about right ahead, and no so far aweh.”

All eyes were now eagerly turned in one direction.

“Ay, there it is!—there it is!” called one after the other—as an ineffectual glimmer flickered just above the waves, and then vanished.

“It’s a small boat—most likely with a message,” said Mr. Stewart to the owner of the lighter. “Slack down your speed, Thomson, and let them take their own time about coming near.”

The next instant there was another brief flare among the unseen waves ahead, but only for an instant: the people in the rowing boat had presumably lit a bunch of paper, to warn the steamer of their whereabouts, and the wind had directly blown out the flame. Nevertheless they at last got within hailing distance—though with great caution, for the unwieldy lighter was rolling heavily.

“We’re from the *Sanda*,” came a hoarse voice through the darkness.

“Who are you?”

“The mate and two of the hands.”

“Where is she?”

“On the Lady Rock.”

"Bless me, how did she get on to the Lady Rock?"

Silence.

"No harm to passengers or crew?"

"Not yet," was the evasive answer.

"Steamer damaged?"

"Ay. I'm thinking her back's brokken. The passengers are ahl out on the rock."

"Well, we'll go over and fetch them off."

"Is it Mr. Stewart?"

"Yes."

"Are we to go on to Duntroone?"

"No. We'll want your boat; and we'll want you too. Come on board; and we'll tow the boat astern."

It was a difficult business on so rough and dark a night; for the men in the smaller boat had a wholesome fear of the lurching and pitching of this great heavy brute of a thing; but at last they managed it; and the *Firefly* was sent on again, with such speed as she was capable of making. It turned out that the mate had no story to tell. How the *Sanda* had got on to the Lady Rock was all a mystery. Or perhaps he deemed it prudent, in the circumstances, to hold his peace.

Then in course of time they began to make out, through the mirk and the wet, certain

minute dots of light, dim and wavering in the distance, and sometimes almost disappearing, as a thick squall of rain would drive by. But when they drew nearer they perceived that certain of these tremulous points of fire appeared to be stationary, while others were moving like mysterious will-o'-the-wisps over the black water; and they guessed that the sailors, furnished with lanterns, were perhaps making such small provision of comfort as was possible for the people huddled together on the reef. And here were two other lights, one red and one green: the port and starboard lights of the stranded ship.

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Mr. Stewart. "She's right on the top of the rock!"

"Ay," said the mate, who was standing by him, "she's well up and over. She's on this side—and lying nearly due east and west."

"Was the man trying to steeplechase her!" the agent demanded—but the mate was discreetly deaf.

Meanwhile the speed of the steam-lighter had been slowed down until she was doing little more than holding her own against the wind and the fierce-running tide—the owner having no kind of wish to go nearer that dangerous reef than he could help.

“We’ll try the first landing with your boat,” said Mr. Stewart to the mate. “Since you came away, you should know the road back. And do not take us too close under the bows of the *Sanda*, for she might slip forward even yet.”

“If she slips forward a few yards,” said the mate, “she’ll go straight to the bottom.”

“And will you go with us, Allan, lad?” continued Mr. Stewart. “Or will you wait on board the lighter?”

“Well, I would rather go with you,” the schoolmaster said, “and take an oar. There’ll be somebody wanted up at the bow anyway.”

And so, after some delay, the boat was hauled alongside; and they jumped or scrambled into it, and got out the oars, and no doubt were glad enough to shove away from the immediate neighbourhood of the lumbering craft. As yet no figures were discernible on the black reef ahead of them; but the dots of yellow light were there—and they were kept briskly moving: this was the last form of signalling left to the stranded folk, after the rockets had all been expended.

And now, even though they were creeping in under the lee, they could hear the appalling

roar of the surf all around these rocks ; and they imagined that their coming would not be unwelcome to the castaways. Apparently for their better guidance, those golden glow-worms that had been scattered about now seemed to converge ; they appeared to be coming close down to the water ; and yet they were kept moving, as if to indicate where some creek had been discovered ; while the man at the bow of the boat, as she got closer and closer, from time to time called aft to his companions.

“No so hard, Hughie ! Back-watter, man ! Back-watter, both of you ! No—you pull a stroke, Mr. Henderson !”

“Ay, ay, in here—in here !” shouted the voices from the rock—and the glowworms were clustered together now, shedding a dull glare on the seaweed and the dark water and on a small group of phantasmal figures.

Well, they were willing hands that were laid on the gunwale of the boat, when the swirl of an eddying wave lifted her near enough to be caught ; and up she went on the slippery seaweed, until she was found to be secure ; then the rescuers stepped out, and Allan got hold of his bundle. It was the strangest sight that met his eyes. The

black reef; the massive black hull of the steamer—chiefly indicated by the obscure illumination still remaining in the ports of the saloon and fore-cabin; the black bars of the beacon, that rose away up into the pitchy skies; the black figures that stood about in detached groups, or stepped warily forward through the seaweed to hear what the newcomers proposed to do: all these were surrounded by a wavering, uncertain, half-impenetrable gloom, for the air was thick with spray and rain, and the wind was blowing hard. Presently, however, one or two of the lamps were brought along, and the sombre phantoms began to take more recognisable shape. Here, for example, was Long Lauchie MacIntyre, contentedly seated in a pool of water, and fumbling about his pockets in search of his pipe; while the man who stood by him (it was Red Murdoch, but he was not of Allan's acquaintance) was gazing out seaward, with a hand held over one of his eyes, doubtless in the hope of reducing to their real number the sailing lights of the rescuing steamer. But the young girl from Kilree?—how was he to discover which she was?—for the women were cowering away from the blast, their faces mostly hidden.

"Is there one Barbara Maclean?" he made bold to ask.

"I am here," said one of those dark figures, in a timid and tearful voice; and at once he went up to her.

"There's a few things here that your aunt and your cousin have sent out to you," said he, "and I am sure you will be glad of them, for the night is so wet. Yes, indeed, now," he went on, "you must take off your shawl, and I will put it over my arm, and here is a dry one. And here is a muffler to go round your neck, and a pair of mittens for your hands. For you must not think they were forgetting you—neither Mrs. Maclean nor Jessie would be likely to do that——"

"I am far awesh from my own home," the girl said, with a sob.

"Oh, yes, yes," said he, in a kindly fashion, "but you are going to another home, and a very friendly home. They could not come out to you; but they let me bring these things out to you; and I am glad to find that matters are no worse. For we will soon have you on board the lighter now, and you will be quite safe."

In common circumstances he was inordinately shy with women; but this poor

creature was quite supine and helpless ; and in her eyes—those beautiful Highland eyes—large, dark-blue, with raven-black lashes—there were piteous tears. He treated her as if she were a child. By the aid of the nearest lamp, he got out these dry wraps, and substituted them for her clinging wet shawl ; he made her put the muffler round her neck, and the mittens on her hands ; and then he said :

“Now maybe we will get away in the next boat—or at least you will. And mind your footing. Do not move on the seaweed—do not move until you find that your feet are on the limpets.”—As if it were necessary to teach a West Highland girl how to cross a slippery rock !

However, they struggled along and reached the water's edge, and, by favour of Mr. Stewart, Allan was allowed to accompany his half-cousin or quarter-cousin in the next boat returning to the *Firefly*. He talked to her a little, to give her courage. He assisted her to get into the plunging and rolling lighter ; and there he guided her aft, and procured for her a warm and comfortable seat by the boiler, himself standing by her side, so as not to take up room. And then

he would have her partake of the little delicacies that Jess Maclean had sent out for her; but she only shook her head; and he was not importunate.

Of a sudden she looked up, timorously.

“Have you the Gaelic?” she asked.

“Indeed I have!” said he, answering her in that tongue.

Instantly a grateful light leapt to her eyes; and at the same moment, somehow or other, she put out her hand, and touched his hand, as if thereby she was recognising some bond or current of sympathy between them. It was a trifling little action, perhaps quite involuntary and inadvertent, and meaning nothing at all; but it thrilled him strangely.

“It is my thanks to you,” said she, now speaking in Gaelic—and she had a shy and softly-modulated voice. “It is not every one that would be so kind to a stranger.”

“But you are no stranger,” said the young schoolmaster, in an encouraging way. “For it is many a time I have heard the Macleans speak of you; and besides, I am myself a relative of yours, though not of the same name.”

And thereupon, to beguile the weary time of waiting, he began and gave her a few

particulars about himself, and about his relations with the Macleans, and about their ways and modes of life. She did not respond much; but she mutely regarded him now and again. Indeed it seemed as if it was not necessary for her to answer him; her eyes did all that; they were the most wonderful eyes—it was not merely that they were beautiful with a mystic and pathetic beauty, but they appeared capable of saying anything, without a word spoken from her lips. For the most part, however, her expression was grave and diffident, as she looked at him from time to time, and listened.

And at last all the passengers—the captain, mate, and most of the crew were remaining by the stranded steamer—had been rescued from their perilous position and conveyed on board the *Firefly*; the blades of the screw began to slash into the tumbling waves; and the vessel moved slowly forward. No farther adventure befell them until they were all safely landed on Duntroone quay—a sorely wet and bedraggled little assemblage; and although it was now about one o'clock in the morning, there were plenty of anxious friends and relatives waiting to receive and

welcome them. And Mrs. Maclean and Jess would fain have had Allan Henderson come into the house and sit down with them at the cheerful and hospitable board that had been prepared for the entertainment of their cousin from the outer isles. But he refused. For some time back he had been drenched to the skin; the only thing now for him was to speed away home, and get to bed. As for the drying of his clothes, well, they would have to take their chance: there was no means of making up a fire, at this hour, in these poor lodgings.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAY AFTER.

NEXT morning opened tranquil and serene; a few flakes of saffron cloud that hung high in the heavens hardly moved through the clear expanse. The mists were slowly rising from Mull and Morven, the hill-sides revealing themselves in hues of ethereal rose-grey, the snow-sprinkled peaks not yet visible. From the eastern skies, just over the early smoke of Duntroone, the golden light of the dawn went level across the bay, and touched the tall spars and the hulls of the vessels moored at Ardentrive, and shone warm along the olive-green slopes of Kerrara; while a small red-sailed boat, coming home from the cod-fishing, made its appearance at the point, creeping along through the steel-blue, rippling sea.

And perhaps it was to refresh his eyes with these beautiful colours, after the black visions of the night—or perhaps it was, more practically, to see what the sun could do in the way of drying his outer garments—that Allan Henderson, before beginning his daily round in the Board School, strolled away round by the quays, and then made up for his favourite plateau on the top of the Gallows Hill. And truly it was a different scene that now met his eyes! Last night the solitary and commanding feature in all the formless gloom was the bold and steady glare of Lismore lighthouse; now Lismore lighthouse was an insignificant little grey object, away at the end of the long, low, green island; while the important things were the ranges of the mountains, velvet-soft in their dappled colours, with faint cloud-shadows here and there—the wide calm spaces of the sea, trembling in pale and liquid azure, with one vivid red spot of a painted beacon at Kerrara point—the ivied castle on its picturesque rock—the wintry woods of green pine and brown larch—the sunlight glinting cheerfully on this or that window in the town—the broad sweep of the bay, with a scarlet-funnelled steamer coming

slowly through the blue, from this lofty pinnacle looking a mere mite of a thing, with a touch of white at its bows. A fair picture—shining, reposeful, benign; no lurid and ghastly vision of the night, with black phantasms huddled together on a cruel rock, the sombre heavens hurling wind and rain at them, the roar and whirl of the unseen surge all around them.

Yet it was to that darker vision, and to the incidents connected with it, that his mind would return, with a singular and incomprehensible fascination. He gazed abroad upon this wide-stretching and placid panorama with eyes that beheld not. A new element—a perturbing element—had entered into his existence; something he did not understand; something nevertheless powerful enough to thrust into the background all his ordinary hopes and ambitions and anxieties, his restless speculations, his heroic or despondent forecasts as to the future. What was this new force, then, that threatened to upset the whole tenor of his life—distracted as that had already sufficiently been? He knew not; or he would not confess; or he feared to think. Happily he could turn his back on the enigma; and was even compelled

to do so; for yonder in the town, overlooking the squalid playground, stood the dingy grey building where his day's labour was shortly to begin. And so, with his brows knit, and his head thrown a little further forward than usual, the schoolmaster strode away down from this wooded hill; and ere long, in that depressing and murmuring room, he had once more taken up his unloved toil.

It was some hours thereafter, it was about mid-day, that Lauchie MacIntyre awoke to find himself in a disused hayloft attached to the distillery. How he had come thither on the preceding night he knew not, nor was there any one to tell him; but that was a minor question; for it is to be imagined that as the shoemaker now sat up and looked about him, there was no more sick and penitent man, bodily and mentally sick and sorry, in all the three kingdoms. Where had he been?—what had he done?—what money had he spent?—nay, what had become of his companion, Red Murdoch?—Red Murdoch, who ought to have gone ashore at Tobermory, but would come on to Salen; and again, after Salen—well, after Salen it was difficult to say anything about Red Murdoch:

he seemed to have vanished away in a mysterious manner. Then there was the young girl, Barbara Maclean—and here Long Lauchie's conscience became filled with a vague alarm—what had become of her?—what had he done with her?—whither had she, too, disappeared? He had a dim recollection of her at some point in the Sound of Mull—for the steward had come to ask about some tea for her : perhaps, indeed, the steward had looked after her when the *Sanda* arrived at Duntroone? All the same, as these remorseful pangs kept urging him, it would be better for him to go along to Mrs. Maclean's, just to see how the land might lie.

He rose to his feet with a prolonged sigh that was almost a groan ; and, with his ten trembling fingers acting as an ineffectual brush, he tried to remove from his sodden garments the too evident traces of his having passed the night on an unswept floor. Then he left the loft, and with shaky knees descended the flight of wooden steps—fortunately there was no one about. Finally, summoning to him such air of confidence as he could command, he passed along the main street until he came to Mrs. Maclean's shop, which he entered.

"I hope you are very well the day, Mrs. Maclean," said he, rather nervously.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the widow with her accustomed cheerfulness. "And you yourself? But you are not looking quite so well. Come away in and sit down——"

"No, no, thank you," said he, shrinking back from the possibility of meeting strangers.

"There's no one in," said she. "Not even Jessie—Jessie has gone over to the house."

Thus assured he stepped into the little parlour, and she followed him, leaving the door a bit open, in case a customer should appear.

"It's little wonder you should be looking not quite so well," she continued, "after such a night as last night. And you'll just take a little drop of something." With which she went to the cupboard.

Now the very soul of Lauchie was crying aloud and in anguish for a glass of whisky; but sternly he held up his hand.

"No, Mrs. Maclean," said he, "I'll no touch it. I wouldna touch a drop. It's a terrible bad thing, whisky. It's the very curse and ruin of the kintry. If I was having my way, I would shut up every

public-house in the kingdom; ay, and I would have every distiller put into djile."

All the same, she put the decanter and the glass on the table—though she did not press him further.

"And have you got your things come ashore from the wreck?" she asked.

He looked up, in a dazed and yet cautiously inquisitive manner.

"Ay: the wreck?" he said.

Had there been a wreck, then? And was that the cause of Barbara Maclean's vanishing into the unknown? But here was her aunt sitting quite sprightly and content. And himself?—if there had been a wreck, how was he come safely here?

"It must have been a fearful time for you," the widow continued, unheeding. "And how the captain managed to put the *Sanda* on to the Lady Rock, just passes comprehension: that's what every one is saying—"

"Was the *Sanda* on a rock?" he demanded, in a bewildered fashion.

Happily she mistook the question.

"Oh, yes, she's on the rock still—the high tide has not moved her. But who knows how long she'll be there, if any rough weather comes? And they're saying that if she had

struck the rock a few yards to the left, she would not have held at all, but would have gone straight to the bottom. I cannot make it out—for there was no such dreadful bad weather. It was bad weather enough,” continued the widow, “that you had out in the west, so I am hearing; and a bad day for the funeral—with such a long way from the house to the seminary.”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” said the shoemaker, quickly, for here he was on firmer ground. “Terrible bad weather; aw, terrible bad weather; and as you say, Mrs. Maclean, a long way from the house to the cemetery——”

A customer entered the shop, and Mrs. Maclean left the parlour. The moment her back was turned Long Lauchie, overcome by the tragic temptation of the opportunity, hastily seized the decanter, with tremulous fingers poured out a glass of whisky, and gulped it down. When she returned he was beginning to feel a bit reassured: if only now he could find out what had become of the young lass Barbara!

“Mrs. Maclean,” said he, tentatively, “it was a bad night for a wreck, was it not?—very wet and uncomfortable—indeed I’m feeling my clothes a wee thing damp even now——”

“And will you not take a drop of the whisky, then, Lauchlan?” said the widow, considerably.

“Aw, Mrs. Maclean,” said the shoemaker, with great solemnity, “that you could propose such a thing, and me just telling you that whisky was the curse of the kinty! You have a bad opinion of me if you think I would be touching any such thing! As sure’s death, I would sooner walk bare-foot to the top of Ben Cruachan than drink a glass of whisky. But as I was saying: it was a coarse night—and—and the wreck—ay, at the wreck, now—that young lass, your niece—I hope she had plenty round her——”

“Oh, well, indeed,” said Mrs. Maclean, “the bundle that Allan Henderson, the school-master, took out to her, was useful enough, no doubt. And it was a friendly thing of the lad to do, seeing that she was a stranger to him. Oh, yes, he is a good lad, he is a kind-hearted lad, is Allan, though he is very stiff-necked, and proud, and ill to manage at times. And when he brought her ashore last night—or rather this morning—and when he brought her up to the house, he would not come in—no—the stubborn chiel

that he is!—but he half-promised to look in and see us this evening.”

Here, indeed, was welcome news : he began to feel the world more solid beneath his feet.

“Well, it’s very glad I am to hear that your niece has not suffered anything from the shipwreck,” Lauchie ventured to say, as he rose to take his departure. “I was looking after her as well as I could—ay—but when there is a wreck—a wreck is a bad thing—a wreck is a terrible bad thing—a man would forget what his own brother was like when there’s so many running backwards and forwards and mekkín a noise. And now I must be going home, for they’ll be wondering at not seeing me ahl this time.”

It was an unfortunate admission.

“Were you not home last night, Lauchlan?” the widow said—her eyes attracted to his clothes, which still showed traces of the hayloft.

He hesitated.

“Well, well—not exactly,” said he. “I had to pass the night with a friend. He was very seeck; and he wanted me to sit up with him. And I was sitting up with him.”

She held the door open for him to pass.

"You'll not take a dram?" said she, finally.

"No, no," he made answer, shaking his head. "No. It would be a bad encouragement for ithers. There's no sich things as that for me." And therewithal he said good-bye, and left the shop, and got out into the open day, his eyes blinking at the stronger light. And perhaps he did go home.

Meanwhile Jess, in her gentle and almost motherly way, had taken under her charge the solitary creature who had been confided to their care; and very glad was she to find that her cousin had suffered but little from her recent experiences: no doubt the island-nurtured frame of the girl was pretty well used to cold and wet and considerable spells of fasting. Moreover Barbara Maclean did not at all appear to be too grievously overwhelmed by her bereavement; she hardly ever referred to her father or the funeral; at the present moment, in truth, she seemed mostly concerned about the wooden chest which contained all her little belongings and which had been left on board the *Sanda*.

"But you are sure to get it to-day, Barbara," Jess said, in her persuasive tones.

“The lighter is bringing everything ashore from the wreck ; and they will send your box up to you. And in the meantime here are my things, and you are welcome to choose just whatever you like.”

The large, dark-blue, pathetic eyes of the girl had been drawn to the two white strips that terminated Jess's sleeves.

“Would you lend me a pair of cuffs like them?” said she—rather slowly, for her English was not fluent. “I was never seeing such beautiful ironing. And do you wear cuffs like that all through the week, and every day in the week?”

“Why not?” said Jess, with a laugh. “I iron them myself. But I will give you a far nicer pair of cuffs than these, Barbara, yes, and a set of tortoise-shell sleeve-links. For, you see, Allan Henderson, that brought you home last night, he is coming in this evening, and perhaps Mr. McFadyen, a friend of ours, as well ; and you must be looking very nice and smart. And I am sure you will give a word of thanks to Allan, for his kindness of last night. He is rather a shy and proud and sensitive lad, and not caring to say much for himself before strangers ; and a word of thanks would please him, I am sure of that.

Mind this. Barbara, it is not every one that Mr. Stewart would have allowed to go out with him in the lighter; so you were fortunate to have some one to look after you on such a night."

For a second the beautiful eyes of the girl—that seemed to say so much, even when they were really saying nothing at all—were raised to her companion's face; but presently she had withdrawn them, inattentive.

"Will you be going out now, Jessie?" said she. "And will you walk down to the quay, until I see if my box is come over from the wreck?"

Jess at once and good-naturedly assented; they made such trifling preparations as were necessary; and in a short space of time the two cousins were passing along the main street of Duntroone.

CHAPTER VII.

A CEILIDH.

EVENTUALLY the box was found and sent along to the house; and, on the return of the two girls, it was opened; and Jess Maclean was somewhat diffidently invited to look over her cousin's small stock of millinery treasures. These were not sumptuous; for the most part they had been procured at the solitary 'merchant's' shop in Kilree, where feminine finery had to be sought for amidst a heterogeneous display of brown soap, candles, figs, sweetmeats, patent starch, paraffin lamps, and the like; they had seen a good deal of weather out there in the west; and now, as Barbara produced them for inspection, it was with a growing sense of disappointment.

"Everything you have seems so neat and

clean and so stiffly-ironed," she said to her cousin, almost resentfully.

"Well, then," said Jess, with the utmost good-nature, "you must just take any of my things that are of use to you. And especially when there are visitors coming to the house——"

"They will be thinking I should be in mourning," said Barbara.

"And I am sure they will think nothing of the kind!" responded Jess. "They know, as the rest of us know, that it is very easy for rich people to buy black silks and black bonnets and things of that kind; but it is not so easy for poorer people; and where could any one get mourning at Knockalanish? As for Allan Henderson, the schoolmaster," Jess went on, with a demure laugh, "it is of little consequence what you wear. He would never see it. If you were dressed as a beggar in the streets, or like the Queen on her throne, he would not know the difference. When he fixes those great eyes of his on you—like burning coals—it isn't your dress he is heeding: he is trying to understand what you are thinking—that is all he cares about."

"You talk a good deal about the schoolmaster, Jessie," observed Barbara.

Jess Maclean flushed quickly, and turned her head away ; but she betrayed no anger.

“I think that every one will be talking of him,” said she, quietly, “before many years are over.”

And thus it was with Jessie's help, and with the loan of a few trifling articles of adornment, that the Highland cousin was got ready for the evening, and very smart and trim and effective she looked. She was indeed a beautiful creature, quite apart from those wonderful, mysterious, appealing eyes ; her features were refined, and even distinguished ; she had the fresh, clear, healthily-tinted complexion that not unfrequently in the western isles is found in conjunction with raven-black hair ; and when she moved, her step was graceful. Her hands, it is true, bore evidence of rough kitchen-work ; but she did not seem conscious of this defect ; nay, she appeared rather inclined to put them forward a little, so that she could better admire the pair of extremely pretty cuffs and the tortoiseshell links that Jess had given her.

Of the two visitors the first to arrive was Mr. Peter McFadyen, who, for a second or so, on being introduced to the stranger, was

somewhat disconcerted and taken aback. For this was not at all the mere crofter's lass he had expected to meet—this young lady in becoming attire, whose manner, if shy and reserved, at least betrayed no great embarrassment. But Peter prided himself on being a man of the world; he had soon recovered his self-confidence; he would hear from herself further details of the shipwreck; and, finding that she was somewhat silent—the conversation being now in English—he proceeded to give authoritative views on tides, currents, beacons, and the proper navigation of Duntroone harbour, yet with a touch of jocosity now and again, to show his lightness of heart. Barbara Maclean listened mutely, and sometimes she looked at her cuffs.

Then the blithe little widow appeared, the shop having been shut; and she was almost immediately followed by the young schoolmaster, who, after having gravely greeted these friends, seemed in a measure disposed to keep away from this newly-found half-cousin of his. He sate somewhat removed; and if by chance, or by some subtle instinct, his eyes were raised to regard the face of the girl, they were almost instantly withdrawn,

as if he were afraid. Of course this was Mr. McFadyen's opportunity. With these women-folk to impress, he was called upon for display; he was determined to shine; he would show them he could talk about other matters than golf. And now—while Mrs. Maclean was stirring up the fire to briskness, and Jess was laying the snow-white tablecloth—it was the marvels of modern science that he had got on to; and in particular he was informing them—as if the illustration were his own—of the astronomers having brought within their ken stars so distant that if, on the day of the battle of Waterloo, news of the victory could have been dispatched to one of these suns, the telegram would not even now have arrived.

“Ay, and that's not all!” he exclaimed—as a premonitory odour of minced collops and onions wandered in from the kitchen. “They're saying there's no end—no end to the universe—you might go on for ever and ever and only come to more worlds and more worlds, and more space and more space—infinite space—infinite—Just think of it—isn't it terrible to realise——”

“But you can't realise it,” said Allan, with a touch of his scornful impatience.

"You can't what?" demanded the town-councillor.

"It is unthinkable," said the schoolmaster, briefly. "The mind cannot conceive the idea of infinite space."

"Ah?" said Mr. McFadyen, with an inquiring glance. "Ah? You've got to imagine a boundary?—You can't help thinking of a boundary? Is that it?"

"Yes, but you're no further forward that way either," said the younger man, imperturbably. "For you can't imagine a final boundary: if you think of a boundary you must think of something outside the boundary: you build a wall, but there must be something outside the wall as well as in. And so it goes on; and the mischief is that you can neither think of space having an end nor yet of its being endless——"

Peter looked a little dazed—and also suspicious; but he solved the difficulty by breaking into a loud laugh.

"Is that metaphysics?" he cried. "Is that metaphysics, Allan? Dod, man, you're a clever chiel; and the School Board 'll have to be raising your salary! An annual increment of £5 is no half enough."

"I'm sure I'm not caring how many worlds

there are," said the contented little widow, as she brought the cruet-stand and put it on the table. "This is the only one that's handy; and I doubt whether a better one ever was made. Draw in your chair, Barbara, my lass; and you, Allan; and you, Mr. McFadyen. It is well for us that we are under a roof, and with a good fire—and not out on the Lady Rock."

Minced collops and onions, a dish of spinach garnished with boiled eggs, and bottled stout: these were the materials of the repast; and a bountiful feast it must have appeared in the eyes of the young lass from the Knockalanish croft. The gay little widow proved a pertinacious hostess; she would take no refusals, would make no concessions to shamefacedness; '*what's good for the Jura factor will do no harm to Fleecy M'Phail,*' she said, as she helped herself and others, with here a rallying word, and there a friendly remonstrance. Indeed this small party that had been brought together to give Barbara Maclean a welcome on her homecoming performed its duty well; surely she must have perceived that it was not amongst strangers she had fallen; only the young schoolmaster remained somewhat aloof and

reserved, and of him she did not take much notice. Then again, when Mrs. Maclean, in her frank and off-hand way, came to discuss the girl's position and prospects, she showed a tact that she had not always at command. She would not have Barbara look upon herself in the light of a dependent. Not at all. Serious duties would be expected of her. She would have to manage this house, for example—the young thing Kirsty was hardly to be trusted. And there was more than that. It appeared that the Macleans, mother and daughter, were in the habit of contracting with the tobacco-manufactory for considerable quantities of Lurgan twist; and this they dispatched in lesser consignments to the 'merchants' in the outer isles. The correspondence attached to this part of the business was carried on by Jess; but Jess knew little Gaelic, and could write none at all; whereas, now, if Barbara would undertake to translate these letters into Gaelic, it would be a great advantage and recommendation to a good many of the customers with whom English was practically a foreign tongue. And what had Barbara to say to all this?

"I am sure," the girl said, speaking rather

slowly, as was her wont, "that I am very willing to do anything that I can do. But I cannot write the Gaelic. I know it very well—oh, yes—better than English a great deal; but I have never tried to write it. It was always English they were having in the school at Kilree."

And now, and almost for the first time this evening, Allan Henderson addressed her.

"If that is all," said he, "there is no trouble. It would be a very easy thing for you to learn the Gaelic spelling, when you know the language well. You would not find it very difficult, after you had got the rules." He hesitated—for the large, beautiful eyes were regarding him calmly, perhaps even curiously. "If you would like," he went on, "I would come along in the evening to give you some lessons. An hour each evening would do. It is a pity you should know Gaelic so well, and not be able to write it."

She did not answer him at the moment: it was Jess Maclean who looked up, startled. For could this really be Allan Henderson, who ordinarily was so backward, or impatient, or scornfully indifferent wherever young

women were concerned, yet who now proposed to devote an hour each evening in the week to this solitary converse? And that was most assuredly what this private tuition would mean. No one else wanted to learn Gaelic spelling. And would the class, consisting of teacher and pupil, be held in the house here, while she and her mother would be over the way in the shop?

At this point Peter McFadyen interposed in a stormily goodhumoured fashion.

“Mrs. Maclean,” he cried, “I call you to order. Surely there has been enough of business—enough of business; and I would not have Miss Barbara bothered with threats of lessons the moment she sets foot in your house. It’s all very well for you, Allan, my lad; every one to his trade; but at the proper time; and the proper time is not every time. No, no; there are other things; there are amusements; we cannot have all work and no play; I may not be very well skilled in metaphysics, but I know when we should have a dance and a song and a merry-making, to keep the game of life going. And let me see: what is there to the fore now——”

He appeared to be summoning up to his

mind the innumerable gaieties of Duntroone in the winter.

“ Well, now, for example, there’s the Gaelic Choir to-morrow night—the practising in the Drill-Hall—and we could not do better than go there, to hear the practising for Mrs. McAskill’s soree. I’m going ; I must go ; I must make my voice heard to-morrow evening—— ”

“ Oh, are you going to sing, Mr. McFadyen ? ” said the widow, encouragingly.

“ To sing ? ” he repeated. “ Well—well—no—for I am not one of the Choir. But as for a song,” he proceeded, refusing to confess himself abashed, “ if it is a song you would like, well, when we are round the fire in a little while, I will try a song, just as if we were at an old-fashioned *ceilidh*.^{*} There is not half enough of spirit among the younger men of the present day—— ”

“ And do you call yourself anything else than one of the younger men ! ” the widow protested, in a kind fashion.

“ Why, in the former days,” continued Mr. McFadyen, affecting not to have overheard this agreeable compliment, “ when you were at supper, and there were fowls at supper,

^{*} *Ceilidh*—a friendly gathering.

and if you found a particular bone, you would send it to such or such a one, and he would have to make verses in Gaelic there and then. So I have heard. I am not good at the Gaelic myself; but as for a song, I would not spoil any merry party by refusing—not at all! And what I was saying was this—to-morrow night, when the Gaelic Choir are at the Drill-Hall, I am going to put a question to them; I am indeed. What kind of songs are they going to sing at Mrs. McAskill's soiree—that's what I want to know. Dod's bless my soul, is there any use in being muzzerable? Is there any use in being muzzerable, Mrs. Maclean?—”

“Well, I never found any myself,” said the little widow, suavely. “And I'm told that giving way to it is fearfu' bad for the congestion——”

“There's some truth in that anyway,” observed the schoolmaster, in a kind of grim undertone.

“Now what's the favourite songs all through the West Highlands?” demanded Peter, indignantly. “I'll tell you, then. There's three in particular. There's the *Fear a Bhata*—the Farewell to the Boatman; there's the Farewell to Fuinary; there's Farewell

to Mackrimmon—all of them Farewells; and are we to have nothing but Farewells and Farewells and Farewells, when a few friends have met together, to pass a merry hour or two? And I know the Choir have plenty of other songs. I can see them in their own books. If I cannot make quite clear sense out of the Gaelic, at least I can read the translation; and there's plenty of sensible songs, instead of Farewells and Farewells."

He suddenly turned to his neighbour.

"Miss Barbara," said he, "do you know the '*Return, my darling*'?"

The colour came swiftly to the face of the young Highland girl on her being thus unexpectedly addressed.

"No I do not," she said, with downcast eyes.

"It is the *O, till, a leannain*, Barbara," said Jess—who was a member of the Choir.

"Well, now, there is a sensible song!" continued McFadyen, with spirit. "Some night I will sing it to you—at present I am not sure of the air. But listen to words like this—

*'If you on my dear one should gaze, should gaze,
If you were to hear what she says, she says,
If you heard my pretty
One singing her ditty
Your bosom would get in a blaze, a blaze.'*

That's sense. That's sensible. That doesna belong to the devil's clan of Farewells! And I must make my voice heard to-morrow evening at the Choir—oh, yes, indeed. We are going to have a merry evening at Mrs. McAskill's—and it is useless lamenting for Mackrimmon, and Mackintosh, and Lovat, and the rest of them. And sure I am that if Miss Barbara here will go with us, there will be an invite for her too; yes, yes; Mrs. McAskill is an old friend of mine; and my friends are her friends. We'll make up a little party, and we'll all go together; and I'm thinking it might be just as well if I brought a machine."

Nor did Peter, in his determination to keep things going gaily, forget his promise about singing them a song, when they had left the table and were seated in a cosy semicircle round the fire. The others had forgotten, it is true; for Allan Henderson had chanced to ask of the widow the origin of a saying she had accidentally used—'Step for step to thee, old woman, and the odd step to Ewen'; and she was telling them the story: how Ewen Cameron of Lochiel was returning home late one night; how he was followed by a witch, who tried to overtake

him; how he made use of this phrase, and held on his way successfully, keeping one step in advance of her, until he reached the ferry; how he had jumped into the boat, while the ferryman drove the witch-hag back; how she had called to Lochiel 'My heart's desire to thee, dear Ewen!' and how he, divining her purpose, had called in return 'Thy heart's desire to the big rock yonder'—whereupon the big rock split into two pieces, visible even unto this day at Ballachulish Ferry. To all this Jess listened half-laughing—she was familiar with most of her mother's old-world sayings and tales; but Barbara's eyes were intent and awe-stricken; and it was the expression of her face, rather than the legend, that held the schoolmaster's attention fascinated and enthralled. Of course the town-councillor was too polite to interrupt. But as soon as Mrs. Maclean had finished her narrative, he put his hand over his mouth and coughed significantly.

"It is not so easy," said he, "to sing without an accompaniment; but a promise is a promise; and I will do my best."

Whereupon he began, in a curious falsetto voice that seemed to come from just behind his teeth, instead of from his chest or throat:

'The sun has gane down o'er the lofty Ben Lomond'

—this was his song; and he was evidently proud of his performance; for he took plenty of time, and introduced all manner of ornate trills of execution, that could only have been acquired by long practice—

*'And left the red clouds to preside o'er the scene,
While lanely I stray in the calm simmer gloamin',
To muse on sweet Jessie, the flower o' Dumblane.'*

The dog!—pretending to sing the praises of Jessie the Flower of Dumblane, when it was as clear as noonday that it was Jessie the Flower of Duntroone he had in his mind. However, there was no covert look or smile; it was too serious a matter for that; for now when he came to the second half of the verse he fairly outdid himself—those flourishes and grace-notes were so abundant that the tune got hopelessly lost amongst them—never had words been so embroidered—

*'How sweet is the brier, wi' its soft faulding blossom,
And sweet is the birk, wi' its mantle o' green;
Yet sweeter and fairer, and dear to this bosom,
Is lovely young Jessie, the flower o' Dumblane.
Is lovely young Jessie, Is lovely young Jessie,
Is lovely young Jessie, the flower o' Dumblane.'*

Nay, when he arrived at the final repetition of the phrase 'lovely young Jessie'—which

is rather high-pitched in the music, he actually opened his mouth, and the consequence was a prolonged and shrill scream : indeed, so effective and overwhelming was the climax of this last line that the widow, carried away by her enthusiasm, called out ‘ Well done !—well done ! ’ and clapped her hands.

“ Mother,” said Jess, blushing furiously, “ there’s more verses ! ”

“ No, no,” said Mr. McFadyen, modestly, “ I’ll not sing any more the night. I got into rather a high key—and—and my voice is a little out of practice—— ”

“ You did well—you did just famously ! ” the widow maintained. But Peter had given evidence of his possession of musical powers, and was blandly satisfied.

Altogether it appeared to be a very happy evening for every one concerned, though, to be sure, the young girl from the outer isles remained distant and silent. And to the young schoolmaster that silence of hers was far more impressive than anything else could have been ; it accorded with a certain indefinable quality, a certain mysterious element of remoteness that seemed to surround her. And what was the origin, he asked himself

as he wandered away homeward through the sleeping town—but not to his books; his thoughts were too perturbed and quick-changing for any application to books—what was the origin of this strange influence she appeared to convey, even without a single spoken word? Was it the mere sense of her loneliness? Or had it anything to do with the circumstances in which he had first encountered her—finding the solitary and forsaken creature on that black reef, with the darkness all around, and the noise of hurrying waters? And what was it that her eyes said, that no mortal eyes had ever said to him before? Those beautiful blue deeps under the raven lashes—so calm, so still, so mystic in their very apathy—did they not bring some revelation, some message wholly apart from mere human emotions and affections?

“They seem to speak of the sea and of the night,” he said to himself, in the long and sleepless hours of recalling and remembering.

CHAPTER VIII.

BARBAROSSA.

THE very next day, to Jess Maclean's astonishment, Allan Henderson walked into the shop: it was a most unusual hour for him to make an appearance.

"There is a half-holiday at the school," he said, "the Head-Master has had great news about his son who is at Oxford. And I was thinking, Jessie, if you were free for an hour or so, you might like to go across to Kerrara, and climb up the hill, and find out if anything further has happened to the *Sanda*. I have got Angus MacIsaac's boat—it's down at the slip——"

Jess Maclean's kindly grey eyes were lit up with pleasure: in Duntroone it is a special compliment and mark of favour for a young man to ask a young woman to go

for a row with him. And this suggestion about the *Sanda* was obviously the merest excuse : every one knew what was happening to the *Sanda* ; she was found to be irremovably jammed on to the rock, and irretrievably damaged ; and the steam-lighter was kept engaged in bringing ashore any of her fittings that might be of value—before the next gale came along to hammer her to bits.

“ Well, I am not so busy,” said Jess, laying down her book-keeping pen. “ There is little doing at this time of the year.”

“ And would your cousin Barbara care to go too ? ” the young schoolmaster added, somewhat diffidently.

The light vanished from Jess Maclean’s face.

“ I should think that Barbara had had enough of boats for a while,” she said, somewhat coldly.

Yet she was the soul of goodhumour and unselfishness. The hurt and disappointed look did not last a second. Was it to be wondered at that he should have conceived a sudden interest in this beautiful creature who had come into their little circle, and who had, by fortune of accident, made especial claim on his attention and pity ?

“Barbara?” said Jess, after a moment, in her usual bland way. “Oh, yes, indeed, I am sure she will be glad to go; and I will run across the way and tell her—if you will step into the parlour and talk to my mother for a moment or two, while Barbara and I are getting ready.” For there was no kind of grudging in this woman’s nature: if it was really on account of Barbara that he had made this proposal—well, Barbara was the more fortunate.

Now Barbara did not respond to this invitation with the gratitude that might have been expected; but Jess at last induced her to go; and when both the girls were ready, they crossed over to the shop, and Allan and they proceeded down to the beach, where the boat was awaiting them. They took their places in the stern; he followed in, and got hold of the oars; then they shoved off, and he set out to pull them across the bay. On the whole it was a most auspicious start; for if the morning had been somewhat squally, all the world was now a blaze of splendour; the Mull mountains, clear to the top, were of an almost summer-like blue; summer-like was the blue of the lapping and flashing waters around them; while between these

brilliant breadths of colour ran the long spur of Kerrara, its russet and russet-yellow slopes basking in the sun. It is true that Jess, knowing the climate, had brought a thick plaid with her; it now lay unheeded over their knees.

And for a considerable time all went well, and they made good progress across to the island. Allan was a capable oarsman; the tall young schoolmaster, despite his slight stoop, possessed a wiry frame; and everybody along this coast can handle a boat. But by-and-bye, and almost imperceptibly, the aspect of things began to alter a little.

“Allan,” said Jess, “I think we are going to have a shower.”

“No, no—no shower,” said he, confidently; for of course he was looking back to the land—and there all was placid sunlight, from the white houses dotted along the terraced cliffs out to the ivied castle at the point.

Jess laughed.

“Allan,” said she, “where is the island of Mull?”

He turned his head. There was no island of Mull. The mountains of tender, ethereal rose-purple and azure had all disappeared; and in their place there was a far-stretching

film of silvery-grey, entirely shutting out the world beyond.

“And what’s that down the Sound?” Jess demanded again.

He turned and looked in the other direction. Off the mouth of Loch Feochan a broad black band lay on the water—a band of almost inky hue; but even as they regarded it, it began to resolve itself—it came creeping stealthily along, leaving a vague indistinctness in its wake. Then Kerrara itself appeared to undergo gradual transformation; the low-lying hills took loftier and mystic forms; through this ever-advancing veil they looked strange and remote. And was there not some darkness assembling overhead?—some pervading gloom all around? The blue had gone from the sea.

“Quick!—quick!” cried Jess—and she opened out the thick plaid and threw it round Barbara and herself, the two of them crouching together, their heads bent down.

Then with a cold and angry swirl of wind came the first rattle of the rain—splashing on thwarts and gunwale, and hissing on the leaden sea; the gloom around them increased; the island they were making for seemed to recede and recede, until it appeared to be a

hopeless distance away ; and then again—in about another couple of minutes—they could descry that same island of Kerrara shining a beautiful golden-green behind the grey folds of the wet ; the world lightened and still further lightened ; and as they once more emerged into blue water and warm sunshine, behold ! the mountains of Mull had returned—the velvet-hued shoulders of purple and soft rose-grey showing along their summits a slight sprinkling of snow, left by the swift-drifting shower.

And now they were come to Ardentrive, the solitary and secluded bay in which the yachts of this part of the coast are laid up for the winter. Very forlorn and ghostly looked those silent, dismantled vessels ; yet they were interesting in a way ; it was like walking past empty rooms, thinking of vanished glories. And as they went from one to the other, Allan chanced to notice that the gangway of a certain schooner had not been properly fixed down.

“ Would you like to go on board and have a look about the deck ? ” said he to his companions. “ It would not be difficult.”

“ If you’re sure there’s no one on the yacht,” said Jess, doubtfully.

"There cannot be," he pointed out. "There's no boat astern. And who would be on board a yacht at this time of year?"

And yet, when at length he had clambered over the gunwale, and opened the gangway, and had got the two girls hauled up on deck, and when they began to peer about, there were some unusual symptoms observable.

"I never saw a boat left like this," said he—for everybody in Duntroone knows something about boats. "Look at the tarpaulin of the skylight—it has been taken off and thrown back again; what is to prevent a gust of wind from blowing it overboard?"

He pursued his investigations.

"Look here," he called again, "the doors of the companion-way have been left open. Let us go down and see the saloon!"

He shoved back the hatch of the companion-way, and proceeded to descend the steps, the two girls rather timorously following. Indeed there was something uncanny in finding themselves in possession of this deserted ship; moreover, beneath them was a vague and mysterious gloom, for the tarpaulin, loose as it might be, quite sufficiently covered the deck skylight.

But the next moment this indefinite apprehension had given way to the most violent alarm and terror. For no sooner had Allan reached the open door of the saloon than he suddenly stopped short, and instinctively threw out both arms, as if to bar the further progress of the women.

“What in the name of God is that!” he exclaimed, gazing with awe-stricken eyes into the dim obscurity.

“It’s a dead man!” cried Barbara, with a piercing shriek. “Come away — Jess! — Jess!”

But Jess was too terrified to move: she could only stare into the semi-darkness at the ghastly object that there presented itself. And Allan, also, stood and stared—wondering whether they had stumbled into dream-land, and broken in upon the slumbers of the Emperor Barbarossa. For at the further end of the sombre saloon, half-reclining against the cushions, and apparently dead asleep, there was an upright figure clad in a white mantle; some kind of crown surmounted his brows; and on the table before him lay a metal instrument, brass or gold it seemed to be in the prevailing dusk. The red-bearded sleeper did not stir or show any

sign of life ; and the silence around him was as the silence of the grave.

“ Jess !—Jess ! ” said Barbara, with ashen lips. “ Come away—it is a work of the devil ! ”

But Jess, trembling though she was, would not leave Allan ; she felt safer standing by him than in trying to flee from the neighbourhood of that appalling phantasm ; unknown to herself she had put her hand on the young man’s arm, and would have dragged him back, when he advanced a step.

“ Who are you ?—and what are you ? ” he demanded, in a loud voice.

The white figure slowly moved ; a pallid face appeared to regard the intruders ; then of a sudden the unknown snatched up the sceptre-looking instrument that lay on the table, and brandished it before him.

“ Away, away ! ” he called shrilly, in Gaelic. “ It’s I that will not be satisfied till the Bay of Duntroone is filled with blood—with blood !—with blood ! Ten thousand down from the Gallows Hill—ten thousand hurled over the Minard cliffs—sweep them, sweep them into the sea—till they know the power of the King ! The power of the King !—that must walk on the neck of his

enemies, and splash the lintels of his door with their blood, till not one of them be left in the land! Hurl them over—crush them—mangle them—slaves, away now, and do my bidding!—for the bloody slaughter shall not cease till the going down of the sun!—”

In his frantic gesticulation, the red beard, which was merely a strip of cow's hide, got disarranged, and fell to the floor.

“It's Niall Gorach,*” cried Jess, in amazement.

But the poor half-witted lad, hearing this real voice, began dimly to perceive that these strangers were actual human beings, not the ghosts and hallucinations he had been accustomed to command, in his madder moments, from this throne of state. He peered curiously at them, in a frightened way, and now he was all trembling.

“Have you come for me?” he said, in pitiful and whimpering tones — and he humbly laid down his sceptre, which was none other than the brass poker belonging to the stove.

“Why, how did you get here?” demanded Allan.

* Half-witted Neil.

“I took a boat from the Corran shore,” he answered—looking furtively and apprehensively from one to the other in this obscure twilight.

“And where did you get the oars for her?”

“I took a piece of wood from the Dunchoillie fence—and—and I watched the tides.”

“And what have you done with her now?”

“I shoved her away.”

“And left yourself to starve! Why, how long have you been on board this yacht?”

“I am not knowing—a long time, I think—many thousands of people were coming to see me——” But here he checked himself; his visionary kingdom was over; and the world of fact and substance had found him.

“And have you had anything to eat and drink?”

“I brought a bag of meal and a cask of water,” he said; and then he added, in an appealing way: “I will give you some if you will not hurt me, or put me in jail.” Nay, so abject and penitent was he, that he took the tinselly crown from his forehead and timidly placed it on the table: it was the last sign and symbol of his abdication.

Well, they were not disposed to be too

hard on the poor wretch, whose royal government of spectral armies, in this solitary cabin, could not have done much harm to anybody ; and, indeed, as it turned out, Niall was the means, the unintentional means, of doing Allan Henderson an excellent good turn this afternoon. For of course they had to take him with them—after they had dispossessed him of his blanket-robe and returned it to a locker, and after they had shut up and made secure everything on board the yacht as well as they could, with some comments on the negligence of caretakers. Then they pulled ashore and landed on Kerrara, leaving Niall in charge of the boat drawn up on the beach. They next proceeded to climb the nearest hill from which they might have a view of the distant Lady Rock, this being the ostensible aim of their excursion. It was, in truth, very little they could see of the unfortunate *Sanda* beyond a touch of red that revealed her funnel ; however, they had come to look at the steamer ; and, now that they had accomplished their object, there was nothing for them but to go away home again —Allan could find no further excuse for prolonging this all too delightful lingering and its secret and magnetic association.

Of a sudden Jess Maclean, who was a sharp-eyed lass, began to giggle, and then to laugh outright.

“Do you know what has happened?” she said. “Where is your boat, Allan?”

The schoolmaster wheeled round. There was no doubt about what had happened. The young rascal Niall, seizing his opportunity, had shoved off, jumped into the boat, and was now making for the mainland, as hard as ever he could pull.

“The scoundrel!” said Allan—not a little disconcerted. “But it is no matter. Angus MacIsaac will catch him when he gets ashore, and Angus will bring the boat back for us.”

“Oh, do you think so?” said Jess, with merriment in her pretty grey eyes. “Well, now, do you see where the daft lad is going? For he is not so daft as to try landing at the quay or any of the slips; no, no; he is making for the little bay at Dunchoillie, and as soon as he has got ashore, he will escape away through the woods. Allan, how many miles is it we’ll have to walk to the ferry?”

Clearly this was now what stared them in the face. Other hope for them there was none. They waited a long time to see if any sane creature should chance to capture the

runaway, and have the understanding to send back the boat; but nothing of the kind occurred; and so they set out—Allan secretly rejoicing—to walk away over the rough island to the ferry that crosses Kerrara Sound.

He bore Niall no ill-will for having played them this trick. The world was full of wonder and a subtle fascination all through the hours of this enchanted afternoon; and when eventually they got across to the mainland there were more of magic spells; for they walked home through a lambent twilight, with a crescent moon of clear gold nearly overhead; while far away in the west, high above the mystic glooms and phantom-shapes of the Mull hills, there was a stormy glare of rose-pink, that sent a warm flush across the now approaching Duntroone, its houses, and woods, and scant gardens. Yes, and all his life seemed likewise to have burst into flame: whether a consuming flame it was for the inscrutable Fates to determine and declare.

CHAPTER IX.

PROBLEMS AND DREAMS.

Now on the Sabbath day it was the custom of the good folk of Duntroone, excepting the ultra-strict amongst them, to permit themselves a little walk along the sea-front after morning service; and this was the next opportunity to which the schoolmaster could look for resuming—without any appearance of intrusive haste—his acquaintance with the wonderful stranger from the outer isles: perchance in the vague hope of inveigling Jess and her to go with him for some brief landward stroll. But alas! for these fond desires. On the Saturday evening there was a filmy and mysterious halo round the crescent moon; an hour or two later the wind began to rise—with a vague premonitory howl; before midnight a full gale was raging,

shaking the house to its very foundations ; and through the long dark there was a clattering of windows and a succession of deluges of rain that told of what was happening outside. Then his first despairing glimpse of the new day seemed to say that all was over. The driven and turbulent sea was of a livid green, with the white crests of the chasing waves whirled aloft and scattered in spindrift ; the water was surging heavily along the quays and springing high in foam ; the roadways were deep in mud ; and a solitary pedestrian, a woman, with her head butted down, and her ineffectual waterproof blown up into a black balloon, was being dragged hither and thither as she strove against the gusts of the storm. A cheerless prospect, truly ; for Duntroone, on a wet Sunday, is the wettest-looking place in all the wild and wet West Highlands.

Nevertheless, the weather was not likely to imprison the young schoolmaster ; out-of-doors could be no colder than this fireless and miserable room of his ; besides, he was restless, ill-at-ease, and longing to be away in free and open solitude ; and so, making some inward excuse about having a look round to see if there was any chance of the day

bettering, he set forth, and eventually found himself climbing to the summit of the Gallows Hill. There he made sure he would have all the world to himself alone.

But it was not so. To his astonishment he discovered that he had been forestalled. Lauchie MacIntyre, the shoemaker, was seated on the bench at the foot of the flag-staff.

“Well, Lauchlan,” said he, “you’re early astir. And what’s brought you up here?”

“My head is not so well,” said Lauchlan, sadly, and he took his cap off and laid it on his knees. “And I thought there would be a fine cold wind blowing on the hill.”

“Maybe you had a little drop last night, then?” Allan suggested.

The melancholy-visaged shoemaker glanced reproachfully at the younger man.

“Aw, Mr. Henderson, that you would think the likes of that of me!—me that’s a Rechabite, and was at a Band of Hope meeting only the night before last. There’s no such things as that for me—no, no. Now look at this: there’s many a man would have tekken to drink long ago in my place. There’s many a man would have tekken to drink when his wife run aweh from him.

But not me—not me; says I to myself ‘Lauchie, let the duvvle go, and welcome to her.’ And this one and that was saying I should go through to Fort William, and bash the head of that little bandy-legged carpenter; but says I to myself ‘No, no; if he’s willing to tek up with a duvvle like that, it is you, Lauchie, that is well rid of them both, and be tammed to them!’ What would I be going to Fort William for? It’s not to Fort William I would be going, when I might have to bring her back again!”

“Yes, I’ve heard you were a married man,” said Allan, absently. And he did not go on his way, as he had purposed doing, to secure silence and solitude for himself. He sate down on the bench, beside the shoemaker. For here at least was a human being, who had come through, in however blind and bleared a fashion, certain of the great crises and experiences of life—had perhaps even, unknown to himself, been face to face with problems and mysteries. What, for example, was the origin of this disenchantment and repulsion that he had so freely confessed? And Allan had no fear of making any humiliating or disturbing discoveries. It

was the truth he wanted, seen from whatever side. He was well aware that a Sancho Panza element exists in human nature, and that not to its detriment: the gargoyle does not detract from the majesty of the cathedral.

"Yet I warrant," said he to Long Lauchie, "that you sang a different song when she was your sweetheart—when you believed her to be the finest creature in all the country—when you cared for nothing, for nothing in the world, so much as to see her eyes look kindly at you when you came near. Isn't that so? Am I right?" he went on, seeing that the dejected shoemaker was silent. "I'm thinking there was a time when you wouldn't have contentedly seen her go away with another man. No; you would rather have been for breaking the head of any man that wanted even to be a little friendly with her. There must have been a time when the madness was on you. They tell me that when a man sees the one woman in all the world that he must have for his wife, it is a kind of madness that comes over him——"

"A madness?" said Lauchlan, gloomily. "Ay. There was ten days of it. Her father he keepit a public-house in Tobermory; and when I came to myself at the end of the ten

days, they were saying that I had promised to marry Jean. Ay, they were saying that. And mebbe I had. And mebbe I had not. But it was of little matter ; for her father he was a decent man ; and there was ahlways a glass for a friend ; and there was a talk of a fine wedding—so I said no more.”

Tinkle-tankle—tinkle-tankle went the bell of the Catholic chapel ; and one or two small dark figures began to appear in the distant thoroughfares.

“But no doubt you hoped for the best,” continued Allan. “And what was’t, think you, made the marriage turn out ill?”

“The drink,” replied Long Lauchie, with mournful resignation. “She was just like the rest. Ahl the weemen are alike. They’re ahl alike. They’re ahl at the drink, or worse. There’s a cousin of mine that is a gamekeeper over on Loch Awe-side, and he says the two classes that mek ahl the mischief of the kinty are weemin and meenisters, and that it’s a pity there does not break out a grouse-disease among them to sweep them ahl aweh. Ay, indeed.”

It was without anger that Lauchlan delivered himself of these quite desperate views of life and feminine human nature :

he had escaped from the toils, and was merely a passive spectator now.

“And do you mean to say,” Allan demanded, “that you allowed your wife to run away from you without making the least effort to bring her back?”

“Well, now,” said the shoemaker, with greater animation, “I will just tell you what happened that day, and I will ask you if I did not do right. I was down at the North Quay, with a friend of mine that was going to Ballachulish, and we were waiting for the *Fusilier* to come over from the South Quay. And when the *Fusilier* was brought alongside, then one of the lads of the steamer he comes running up the gangway, and he says ‘Lauchie, do you know that your wife is in the fore-caybin?’ ‘No,’ says I, ‘I do not.’ ‘Well she is,’ says he, ‘and him that’s along with her is MacKillop, the carpenter, from Fort William; and I’m thinking it’s not ahl right, from the look of them.’ ‘And do you tell me now,’ says I, ‘that my wife is rinning aweh with MacKillop the carpenter?’ ‘It is not for me to answer such a question,’ says he. ‘It is for you to come on board and get hold of your wife.’ ‘Is it?’ says I. ‘Then I will see her tammed first. If she’s rinning

aweh with the bandy-legged carpenter, let the duvvle go and welcome!’ Then says Johnnie: ‘They are carrying a big bundle between them.’ Well, at that, Mr. Henderson, at that something came over me. ‘Johnnie, lad,’ says I, ‘come aweh down quick to the fore-caybin, and you’ll seize hold of the bundle, and I’ll give the carpenter a clout that will mek him think it’s the Day of Chidgment.’ That’s what I was saying; and my foot was on the gangway; but I stopped. Ay, indeed, I stopped. Says I to myself: ‘Is it not a good thing to be rid of a lot of weemen’s clothes? Does any one want a lot of weemen’s clothes hanging about one’s house?’ And back I stepped from the gangway. ‘Let them go to Fort William, or to the duvvle, bundle and all!’ says I—and in a few minutes aweh went the *Fusilier*, and I’ve never set eyes on either of them since. And there’s many a man would have made that excuse for tekkin to drink; but I’m not wan of that kind; no, no; I would rather do what little I can to banish ahl that sin and shame from our kintry. Ay, that’s jist what it is: drink is the sin and shame of the kintry. Have you a fill of tobacco, Mr. Henderson?”

But Allan had left his pouch behind him. So Lauchie with a patient sigh put his pipe in his pocket again, and rose to his feet.

"I am thinking I will be getting home now. My head is not so well. Mebbe I will try lying down on my bed for a while—there is little hope of meeting in with a friend on a day like this." So Long Lauchie departed; and the young schoolmaster was left alone with this great, wide, far-stretching world of moving shapes and vaporous glooms.

Nevertheless there was still some small glimmering of hope. Occasionally there would come a suffused silvery look into a portion of the eastern skies; the lurid and formless heavens would show symptoms of banking up; while the slopes of Kerrara, catching this or that wandering gleam, would burn an intense russet-yellow against the blue-black of the Mull mountains. Then again a gradual fading of that wild glare; a gathering darkness; an advancing murmur of wind and water; and forthwith a white smoke of rain would go tearing across the bay, the squall whirling onwards with the hurrying waves. There was not a dog visible along all the deserted sea-front of Duntroone.

However, storm or shine, the people would soon be coming out of the churches now, and so he slowly and watchfully made his way downward from these gusty heights. As the first of the worshippers began to appear, he quickened his pace; he would have to intercept the two girls—yet in a casual kind of way; most likely they would make straight for home, instead of attempting any promenade along the wet concrete, that was now all littered with seaweed. And this was precisely what happened. Another minute or two and he would have missed them. He encountered them at the corner of the street. They had had no thought of going along by the sea-front on such a morning.

“Well, now, Allan,” said Jess, with her grey eyes smiling benignly (Barbara paid little heed to him: she seemed more concerned about keeping her waterproof-sleeves well over her wristbands) “this is not a day for any one to be outside. Will you come home with us, and take a little bit of dinner with us?”

“It is very kind of you, Jessie,” he was beginning to say, with some embarrassment, when she interrupted him.

“But you are going to refuse, as usual. Do you think it is very friendly, Allan? I know that we cannot talk about anything that would interest you, for the President of the Duntroone Literary and Scientific Society is such a great person; but we would make you welcome; and cousins, cousins in the Highlands especially, should not be so ceremonious.”

Well, the President of the Duntroone Literary and Scientific Society might or might not have been a great and learned person; but at least he had not the heart to refuse this cunningly-worded invitation; and the next minute he was accompanying the two girls on their homeward way.

“And who knows,” continued Jess, in her kindly fashion, “but that the afternoon may clear up a bit, and Barbara and you and I might go for a walk over to Ganavan? Oh, yes, it is just as likely as not to clear up a little!”

And eventually, as it turned out, her cheerful optimism was rewarded; for by three o'clock the state of affairs looked sufficiently promising to induce them to leave the house; and deep was the joy in Allan's heart when they had actually set forth upon

this excursion. They took an inland route to begin with, but it mattered little to him whither they went. Perhaps it was merely chance that placed him by Barbara's side as they started off; at any rate, he found himself once more subject to the overmastering spell of her mere presence—the inexplicable, extraordinary entrancement of being near her—the wonder and delight of being able to regard the wind stirring the wisps and tangles of her raven-black hair. And indeed that was about all of her companionship that she vouchsafed to him. She rarely spoke, except to answer a question: it was Jess who did all the talking, teasing him and mocking him, and yet becoming sympathetic enough when she happened to touch upon anything really affecting himself or his future.

They left the highway—they followed a farm road—crossed some heights and knolls—and came in sight of the western seas again. A sombre day, perhaps, for a country walk; and yet there was plenty of colour in the wintry landscape—the yellow of the pastures, the dank crimson of the withered breckan, the intense green of the whins, the blood-red of the bramble-stems trailing across

the swollen brook. And when, as they were descending from the heights towards the shore, a sudden fire broke through the heavy clouds lying over the mountains in Mull, why, all the world around them grew radiant, and even the leafless ash-trees caught something of the welcome light, a shimmering touch of silver on the branches that stretched away up into the leaden-hued sky. A most comforting gleam ; it was full of promise ; it seemed to speak of a general breaking up of those louring heavens : perhaps, by the time they were returning home they might have for company the crescent moon.

At the foot of the hill the burn runs at right angles, and as they were crossing the rude little bridge Allan happened to espy, under the straggling blood-red stems of the brambles, a small white star.

“Why,” he said, “there is the first wild-flower I have seen this year !”

He stepped down the slippery bank, reached under the bushes, and brought away the tiny prize. It was only a daisy—not ‘crimson-tipped’ at all—but pale and colourless ; none the less the first timid harbinger of the spring was surely an interesting thing, with its mystic message of wonder and hope.

Then it was in its way a rarity; he was bound to present it to one of his companions. To which of them? Jess rather stood aside a little, looking askance.

“Would you care to have it?” said he to Barbara, and he shyly offered her this humble little token.

Yes, she took it; and she thanked him in a kind of fashion—that is to say, with her voice, not with any glance of her unfathomable eyes; then they went on again. And Jess had not lingered behind to wipe away any sudden tears of mortification and reproach; for she was a sensible lass; and she had but the smallest sense of her own importance and value in the world. Only, for a little time, she was silent and preoccupied.

They went down to the shore, and the sands, and the rocks, round which the dark green sea was monotonously washing, with crisp white flashes of foam here and there. A lonely place; as the calling of the startled birds bore witness—curlews, oyster-catchers, sandpipers, and the like; while everywhere there was dispersal—the black and white gleam of a pair of arrow-flighted mergansers, the slow-flapping laboured progress of a heron, the cautious retreat of a deep-

swimming skart that was already a mile out from shore, dipping its head from time to time, and paddling still further away. But in a very few minutes silence prevailed again ; several of the flocks of birds returned to their feeding-grounds ; and when the three strangers, having sought out a convenient seat for themselves on the rocks, took their places, there was no further cry or sign of protest against the intrusion.

And of what did these young folk talk, in the gathering twilight ? Allan Henderson hardly knew. The folds of her dress were visible to him, that was enough ; the magnetic, alarming consciousness that she was almost within touch of him ; the secret wistful hope that sooner or later she might turn towards him more friendly, more interested, eyes. It was Jess who rather came to the rescue ; and so also on their way back to the town ; she had heard of the great German mediæval poem that Allan was endeavouring to translate ; and she wanted to know how he was getting on with the laborious task ; and sought to reassure him about his doubts as to whether he should be able to find a publisher. For she was a kindly, helpful sort of creature ; and she had

a resolute faith in the future of this young man.

The last of the twilight was vanishing as he parted from them at the house in Campbell-street. And it was with a heavy heart, it was with a bitter sense of disappointment and despondency that he turned away and set out for home. For too surely he had observed that the first little tentative token of friendship he had offered to Barbara Maclean she no longer carried in her hand. Doubtless she had tossed the worthless thing aside into the highway, to be trampled in the mud; or perhaps she had idly dropped it into one of the brackish pools—half-rain, half seawater—out on the dark rocks where they had been sitting, during an enchanted but hopeless hour.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUN-GOD.

THEN the great evening drew near on which the McAskills of the Argyll Arms were to entertain the members of the Gaelic Choir and other friends; and Peter McFadyen had been as good as his word, he had procured an invitation for Barbara. At first Jess was doubtful as to whether it would be quite fitting for their family, in view of recent events, to be present at any such festivity; but she found that Barbara was not at all sensitive on the point; and the compromise finally suggested by Mrs. Maclean was to the effect that the two girls should go to the soirée and concert, but should either come away, or remain for a little while as mere spectators, when the dancing began. And Jessie was indefatigably kind in looking after Barbara's costume, and lending her

some small trifles in the way of feminine finery.

“Every one will look at Barbara,” said she, laughing, to her mother, “and no one will look at me; so it’s but right she should have the choosing of anything I have.”

And again Mr. McFadyen was as good as his word: on the momentous evening in question, and for mere extravagance and display, he brought a ‘machine’ to take the two girls round to the Volunteer Drill-Hall; and Barbara, stepping across the pavement, found herself ushered into a vehicle the like of which she had never entered before—a vehicle with luxuriously-cushioned seats, and windows that could be shut up against the rain, and lamps that sent out a soft glow out into the black night. Mr. McFadyen, fussy, eager, proud of the charge that had been bestowed on him—for Mrs. Maclean had begged to be allowed to remain at home—was in the highest of spirits; and there were more triumphs, more feats of prowess, to announce: Gilmour had again been beaten on the links that very afternoon.

“It’s the Pinnacle,” cried Peter, chuckling and grinning, and he rubbed his hands in delight. “It’s the Pinnacle that bashes

Gilmour every time! And the angry man he is!—smashing at the ball with the lofting-iron, and then grinding his teeth as he watches it come trinkle, trinkle down the hill again, right back to his feet! Dod, that Pinnacle 'll be the death o' the station-master, as sure's I'm living!"

The way up to the Drill-Hall was along an obscure back-lane; and in the prevailing darkness the 'machine' moved cautiously; but at length it stopped at the foot of some steps in front of a large, oblong building, and Mr. McFadyen descended to hand out his companions. And what was this sound that came from the interior of the hall?—this was no feeble trembling of a Jew's-harp—this was the shrill and warlike scream of the pipes—it was the 'Athole Gathering' that was being played to welcome the now-arriving guests. The proud McFadyen, when they got up to the door, would fain have entered with one of his charges on each arm; but clearly there was no room for this ostentatious parade; and so, as Jessie hung back a little, in her usual fashion, it was Barbara whom he found himself escorting in—Barbara, whose great, beautiful eyes looked with dumb wonder and astonishment

on this gay spectacle—at the brilliant illuminations, the walls and ceiling hung with flags of resplendent colour, the long tables sumptuously set forth and decorated. She was bewildered, but not frightened. She shook hands with her host and hostess without perturbation. And then the three newcomers moved on to an open space from which they could the better observe the subsequent arrivals.

“So you say Allan Henderson is not to be here to-night,” Mr. McFadyen remarked to Jess. “Why that? Maybe he thinks his clothes are not quite smart enough for such a fine gathering.”

Jess flushed quickly—perhaps angrily, despite the habitual gentleness of her nature.

“He has no need to think of any such thing,” said she. “He would look well wherever he went, and in whatever clothes. It’s not clothes that give a man a distinguished appearance.”

There was more than a touch of indignation in her tone. And then she went on again, proudly—

“Perhaps there may be something of more importance for him to be thinking about than a concert and a dance in a drill-hall.

Do you know this, Mr. McFadyen—that he is preparing a lecture on the Folk-Songs of Germany, and he is translating the lesser-known amongst them himself? Any one else would take the Folk-Songs that have already been translated and be content with them; but that is not Allan's way; he is too thorough, too much in earnest for that; and suppose, now, when the lecture has been delivered to the Society, it was afterwards to be put into shape and sent to one of the great magazines in London—and perhaps with his name too—that would be something for one to speak of, and him only a school-master in Duntroone."

"You seem to be very familiar with Allan's plans," said the town-councillor, rather spitefully.

"Then it is not from any boasting on his part," Jess retorted, with a fine courage. "It is not boasting that he is given to. And some day we may not be wondering quite so much that he found something more important to do than come to a merry-making of this kind."

"Ay, well, well," said Peter. "Allan is a good lad. There's many a worse lad than Allan, whether he has a small salary or a

big one. And I'll buy the magazine, yes, that I will. I would not be surprised if I bought six copies of it, and gave them about. He's a good enough lad is Allan." For he would not have had this unfortunate little disagreement continued on so auspicious an occasion; especially as every moment new friends were arriving, and he was eager to show that he had been entrusted with this guardianship. Which of the younger men would have been so favoured?

Meanwhile Barbara had not overheard a single word, so wholly engrossed was she with the kaleidoscopic and many-coloured scene before her. But amongst all the guests who were now assembled there was one whom her eyes followed with a curiosity that at length became a species of fascination. He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, fair-complexioned, with close-cropped curly or rather wavy hair of a light golden-brown. He seemed to be acquainted with every one; as he went about he was laughing and talking to this one and that; he had a happy, goodnatured, confident air; he was much at his ease; his manner seemed to say that he was pretty sure of his welcome wherever he went. Then what rendered

him not less conspicuous was that among all the men in the room he alone wore evening dress. Barbara had never seen evening dress before—except, perhaps, as pictured in some stray copy of a penny illustrated paper; but now here, amid these brilliant lights, in this fine company, it appeared to her altogether beautiful. Beautiful was the fine, smooth, black cloth that seemed to show off the young man's figure so elegantly; beautiful the shining shirt-front, with its neat little single stud of gold; necktie and collar and cuffs—all were perfection, and all were worn with such freedom and grace. In dress, in manner, in appearance, he was so wholly different from the others. Could he be the son of some great laird, she asked herself, with a kind of awe. And intently her eyes followed him, as he moved hither and thither, shaking hands with this one, nodding to that—a radiant being—an apparition: had the time come back for the gods to descend and appear among men?

And then Barbara found herself all trembling—and wishing to be away—and yet powerless to escape. He was clearly coming to this corner; and quickly too; he had a card in his hand.

“How are you, Mr. McFadyen?—I’ve got you at last,” said he, and his voice had a cheerful ring. Then he seemed to recognise the fact that the town-councillor had companions. “Oh, how do you do, Miss Maclean!—I hope you are going to give me a dance to-night——”

“This is my cousin Barbara, Mr. Ogilvie,” said Jess.

He turned towards her with the briefest glance, and bowed. The poor lass—overcome by the splendour of his presence—her eyes abashed and fixed on the ground—made some bungling little effort at a curtsy. It was all she knew; she could do no better; and probably she was hardly aware of what she did. And most likely he did not notice; for he had turned again to McFadyen.

“We’ve put you down for a toast, Mr. McFadyen,” said the young Master of Ceremonies. “You have to propose the ladies——”

“No, no—na, na,” said Peter, in sudden fright. “No speech-making from me——”

“But why not?—why not?” remonstrated the young man. “You can make fine speeches about water-rates and gas-lamps—I read the reports in the paper every week;

and you're the ladies' man—you're the very one for this toast——”

The councillor had been disconcerted only for a moment. He was not going to play craven, with Jess looking on.

“Well, I'll not deny,” said he, pulling himself up a bit, “that I can say a few words at a fitting time. I'm not an orator, perhaps——”

“You'll do just splendid,” said the light-hearted M.C., hurrying away to get his other business finished—and leaving poor Barbara with an overwhelming conviction that she had been guilty of a stupidity and awkwardness too dreadful to be recalled or even thought of.

And a very merry, happy, excited, loquacious assemblage this was that eventually got itself seated at the long tables; and right gallantly did the town-councillor proceed to look after and entertain his two companions. It is true that at times a thought of his appointed speech would suddenly penetrate him; he would collapse and sink into himself—no doubt desperately hunting in the dark spaces of his mind for *impromptus*; but then again he would rouse himself and shake off these vain anxieties,

and would strive to convince his neighbours that for wit, and sarcasm, and apposite raillery there was not one of the younger men in Duntroone to come anywhere near him. And Jess was willing to be pleased; it was an animated, inspiriting scene—what with the radiant lights, the festooned flags, the decorated tables; while for variety's sake the general hubbub of conversation would be broken in upon at intervals by the wild skirl of the pipes—the three tartaned heroes marching round the hall playing ‘The Hills of Glenorchy,’ or ‘Hoop her and Gird her,’ or ‘Mrs. Ronald Graham’s Welcome Home.’ As for Barbara, she sate as one isolated and estranged. Her eyes followed the sun-god—covertly and intently regarding every smile and glance and gesture. And she had ample opportunity for this secret observation; for the young Master of Ceremonies seemed to be looking after everybody but himself; he went from table to table, joking and laughing, and keeping things moving generally. And Barbara’s heart sank within her when she saw that those women he spoke to—maids and matrons alike—were all so splendidly dressed, and had such fine adornments about their sleeves, and their necks,

and the doing-up of their hair. She became conscious that her cousin Jess and herself were the two most simply-attired young people in the room—a simplicity that appeared to her a distressing plainness. Had the sun-god taken notice? At least he had not stayed talking to them, as he now stayed talking to those others.

“Jessie,” said Barbara, at length—and her eyes were cast down, and she spoke in tremulous hesitation, “who was the—the young gentleman—that came up to you?”

Jess had forgotten.

“Which one? When?” she asked.

“Before we sate down,” continued Barbara. And she ventured to raise her eyes a little. “He is standing over there by the door.”

Jess glanced in the direction indicated.

“Oh, that’s Johnnie Ogilvie,” said she, blithely. “He’s the Purser of the *Aros Castle*.”

Barbara was silent for a second or two, gazing furtively the while.

“Does he live in Duntroone?”

“Well, he’ll very soon be living in Duntroone, for they put the *Aros Castle* on again at the beginning of next month. And I suppose that is why he has come through

here to-night—though he is a great friend of the McAskills whatever.” Then Jess laughed. “But you must not be casting your eyes that way, Barbara. He’s a fearful lad is Johnnie Ogilvie, for breaking young girls’ hearts. At least so they say. I do not believe the lad is any worse than others.”

Here silence was called-for by a tumultuous hammering on the tables that made the crystal jump, for Mr. McAskill had risen to say a word of welcome to his guests and to ask them to drink a glass with him. And this was the beginning of the speech-making; but in truth there was not much of it; for there were many things to be got through. It ought to be recorded, however, that Mr. McFadyen acquitted himself well; he was jocose within due moderation; he paid a manly tribute to the charms of youth and beauty; and he earned great applause by saying he would not detain his audience, because they were all looking forward to seeing those bewitching creatures who now sate expectant by their side—those divine creatures who were the sweeteners of man’s destiny here below—they were all looking forward to beholding those angelic forms to

still better advantage in the mazy intricacies of the dance.

Then the members of the Gaelic Choir withdrew and re-assembled on the platform; the remaining visitors also rising from the tables, to allow the attendants to clear the hall. And soon this large, hollow-sounding place was filled with music less ear-splitting than that of the pipes; the sonorous, softened part-singing of the trained choir was an admirable feature of the evening's entertainment; the guests could not have thanked their host in happier fashion. It may be admitted that the majority of these concerted pieces were of a mournful cast; one of them, in especial—'The Braes of Glen-Braon'—in its heart-breaking wail seemed to give expression to all the sadness and loneliness of the remote and sea-swept isles; but those present were familiar with the prevailing character of Highland minstrelsy; they were not too much cast down by those successive 'Farewells' against which Mr. McFadyen had energetically protested. 'Farewell, Farewell to Fuinary!' sang those harmoniously-modulated voices; then came the 'Lament of MacCrimmon'—with one woman's voice ringing clear and high above the

low-rumbling refrain, as if it were some wild note heard from the surge of tumultuous waves ; they repeated the plaint of the distant lover—

*‘ O could I be, love, in form of sea-gull,
That sails so freely beyond the sea,
I’d visit Islay, for there abiding
Is that sweet kind one I pine to see’*

—with many another favourite. Meanwhile the great hall had been prepared for the dancing ; and the pipers were awaiting the word.

“*Suas a’ phiob !*” called out the impatient McAskill.

And presently, after a discordant tuning-up of the drones, the pipes broke clear away into ‘The Marchioness of Tweeddale’s Delight’ ; and that was the signal for the Choir to come hurrying down from the platform, to secure partners, or to be chosen as partners, for the Grand March was about to take place. Then Mr. McAskill and his sister-in-law led the way ; the other couples fell in ; the pipers blew their bravest ; and down the long hall went the joyous procession, every one elated with thoughts of the gaiety that was about to follow. There had been enough of speech-making and of

singing of Farewells; in due course the reel-stage would be arrived at; and the pipers would have encouragement to put fire and glow into the proceedings, if an occasional dram would help.

Now of all the people here gathered together, only three remained apart.

"Really, Mr. McFadyen," said Jess, "I am quite ashamed to be keeping you away from the dancing, and you so fond of it——"

"Not at all—not at all!" protested the gallant Peter. "I undertook a charge, and I must fulfil it. And gladly too. I'm just quite proud and pleased to stay here with you. They'll be plenty of capering later on: five o'clock will not see the last of them out o' this place."

"But if we went away now, it would leave you free," said Jess; and then again, observing that Barbara's attention was so completely absorbed by the pageant taking place before her that it seemed merciless to tear her away, she added: "Well, maybe Barbara would like to stay just a little while yet."

This, at all events, Barbara heard. She turned her great, mystic, appealing eyes to her companions, and said—

“ Oh, yes—yes, I would ! A little while more, Jessie ! ”

For it was not only the pageant ; better now than before her rapt observation could dwell on the young Master of the Ceremonies, who seemed to combine in himself all the elegancies and graces of youthful manhood—elegancies and graces of a kind she had never hitherto dreamed of. Even his patent-leather boots—the wonderful polish—the pointed and symmetrical shape—the lightness they seemed to lend to his step : this also was another marvel, an allurements, a mystery of fascination. And when the Grand March was over and the pipes had ceased, when the band had come on to the platform, and a quadrille was being formed, it appeared to her as though he were the moving spirit in all this brilliant throng : no wonder those finely-dressed dames, and the younger women with their hair done up in fashionable ways, regarded him with favouring looks and answered him with smiling words.

But Jack Ogilvie, Purser of the *Aros Castle*, would have been a very poor Master of Ceremonies had he allowed those three to remain neglected : he swooped down upon them, with urgent remonstrances, until Mr.

McFadyen got a chance of interposing an explanation as to why they were taking no part in the programme. Then the young man went away again, for it was a busy night with him. To Barbara it was as if she had been in a 'dwawm'—a dim, half-conscious swoon—while he was so near her, while the sound of his voice was in her ears.

At length, however, the prudent Jess thought it was time for them to depart; Barbara mutely yielded—with some lingering, backward glances; Peter McFadyen had the 'machine' in waiting; and the girls were driven home under his escort. He left them at the open door—for he was returning to the Drill-Hall, where there might yet be a chance for him to shine in the Varsoviana or the Guaracha; and they entered the house to find the blithe little widow awaiting them, with the inevitable tea-pot on the hob.

"And who, think you," said Mrs. Maclean, as the girls were taking off their things, "who, think you, was here all the evening? Who but Allan Henderson! Isn't he the sober, quiet lad to think of coming to talk to an old woman, when you young folks were away gallivanting by yourselves? Poor

Allan," she continued, as she put the tea-cups on the table, "I'm afraid he's not very happy and settled at present. He was wondering whether he should not try another country, where there might be a better opening for him. But we cannot allow that—we cannot allow that at all! For Allan to leave Duntroone would be just a public calumny——"

"Is it a public calamity you mean, mother?" Jess interposed.

"Ay, that's what I said," the widow went on, in her complacent fashion. "And I was telling him, instead of going to another country, he should just start a small boarding-house in Duntroone, so that some of the farmers at a distance could send in their children that they wanted to have regularly at school. Only, Allan would need to have a wife to manage for him; and there's more than one lass would be willing, that I'm sure of; for he's a good lad is Allan; and you're always saying yourself, Jessie, that he's astonishing clever, and will do great things yet. Well well, I hope the struggle will not bear too hard on him."

Barbara Maclean took no part in this discussion. She was standing in front of

the fire, staring into it. It was not of the schoolmaster, and of the poor outlook of his life, that she was thinking—there were more luminous, fascinating, wonderful pictures burning in her brain.

CHAPTER XI.

“THE WILD TEARS FALL.”

BARBARA MACLEAN'S household duties were light; practically she had the mid-day to herself; and she had got into a habit of stealing out and wandering along to the triple windows of the chief draper's shop in the town, where she would stand gazing with entranced and covetous eyes. This was indeed different from the “merchant's” store at Kilree; here were beautiful kid gloves with furred wrists and many buttons, silk kerchiefs of every hue, ribbons and laces, boas, muffs, tartan scarves, elegant black hats with surmounting black feathers, and a hundred things each more wonderful than the other. And occasionally a waggonette would drive up, bringing in some family of gentlefolk from the neighbouring country;

and as mother and daughters descended, and crossed the pavement, Barbara would watch them with an eager and furtive scrutiny, marking every detail of their deportment and dress. And then she would return to the study of this resplendent finery—which was all so far away from her; for although her aunt had insisted on her accepting a small salary, it was merely to save the girl's sense of independence, and did not bring these fascinating things any nearer her.

Now by some means or other Allan the schoolmaster had become aware of this trait in Barbara's character, and it greatly interested and pleased him. A man is tolerant and lenient where a woman has thrown the magic glamour of her eyes over him; this peculiarity, the young schoolmaster said to himself, only proved her to be a daughter of Eve; she was human, she was one of ourselves; she was no impossible and visionary maiden come out of the night and the sea. And on a certain afternoon he went along to Jess, whom he found at the counter.

"Jessie," said he, with even more than his usual diffidence, "if your mother is in, could you come with me for a few minutes to McLennan's the draper's?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" said the ever-good-natured Jess; but she looked up wondering: what concern could the grave and studious Allan have with a haberdasher's shop?

"I want you to help me to choose a little present—something a young girl would like—something pretty and smart that she could wear——"

Jessie's face flushed quickly; and she seemed to draw back in confusion.

"But why should you think of such things, Allan?" she said, in a tone of remonstrance. "Why should you wish to give finery to anyone? I know your own tastes are all very simple; and it is not right for you to be spending money in this way——"

"But, Jessie," he answered her, though still with a certain shyness, "I am anxious that Barbara should feel she was amongst people who wish her well. She is a young girl—and still partly a stranger—and I was thinking if I could get something that would please her—a little present of that kind would at least show a friendly intention—and she would understand it."

He did not notice the swift change of expression—of alarm, almost—that had passed

over Jess Maclean's face the instant he had mentioned Barbara's name.

"Oh, yes," she said, in eager haste. "You are quite right, Allan. I am sure it would please Barbara. And as you say, she may be feeling a little strange yet in Duntroone. Oh, yes, for Barbara. It's quite different with Barbara. And will you be going now? For I will get ready at once." And with that she disappeared into the back-parlour, to fetch her things.

He never knew what keen arrow he had driven through her heart. For she was a brave kind of a lass and naturally cheerful; and by the time these two were walking along the pavement, on their way to the draper's, she was making merry over the idea of the austere and absent-minded student going to buy millinery, and was teasing him, and mocking him with her mischievous eyes. But she was very friendly all the same; and in the shop her counsel was sage and prudent—for she knew that, though his means were scant and his own habits as regarded himself sparing enough, there was Highland blood in his veins, and there was no saying but that he might do something reckless. Eventually they decided upon a *jichu* of black silk,

trimmed with black lace, and adorned with black glass bugles. It was Jess Maclean's inward surmise that the bugles would prove attractive to Barbara.

Then arose the question of presentation; and here again Jess unselfishly came to his aid; she could see that he was awkward and unskilled in such affairs, and perhaps also a little apprehensive.

"Why not come along in the evening?" said she, "and smoke a pipe as usual; and I will send over to the house for Barbara; and you can give her your present without any great formality. Sure I am she will be very proud of it."

"That's what I will do, then, Jessie," said he. "And I am very much obliged to you." And then, having seen her as far as the door of the shop, he turned and made his way home to his books—or to such wild fancies and hopes and fears as would obstinately thrust themselves between him and the printed page.

But he need not have been at all apprehensive as to the manner in which Barbara would receive his present. When, later on, he was in the little parlour, and when, in answer to a message, Barbara came over

from the house, any one could have seen that she knew what was going to happen : there was a tinge of pretty embarrassment in her face, and she shook hands with him in a shy kind of way, and for a second—O wonder of wonders!—the beautiful dark-blue eyes, from under their jet-black lashes, glanced at the young man with quite unusual and modest friendliness. He was bewildered—his heart went beating—so that he could scarce explain to her his reasons for begging her to accept this simple gift ; but Jess proceeded to open the small packet ; and Mrs. Maclean was loud in praises of the *fichu* ; while Barbara's mystic and unfathomable eyes were filled with pleasure when she beheld the silk and the lace and the glittering beads. Then she turned to the young man. She hesitated. And it was in Gaelic that she had to speak her thanks to him, the English not coming freely enough or not being expressive enough ; and for another ineffable moment her glance dwelt upon him with the kindest regard. And if he was bewildered before, he was bereft of his senses now. He had it in mind to sell his books and all his belongings and lay out every farthing in McLennan's shop. But at this point the town-councillor made

his appearance, and something like sanity was restored.

Peter McFadyen, as it turned out, was an angry man. Nay, did not some tone of complaint and reproach run through his tale of injury—seeing that Lauchie the shoemaker was an especial friend of Mrs. Maclean's?

“I just went into the Argyll Arms”—such was his indignant story—“to say to Mrs. McAskill what everybody has been saying ever since the dance, that it was one of the greatest successes ever known in Duntroone; and I was not inside but a few minutes; and when I came out, here was this man Lauchlan MacIntyre—your friend Lauchlan, Mrs. Maclean—and he was waiting for me round the corner. Confound his impudence! ‘Oh, Mr. McFadyen,’ says he, ‘I’m sorry to see ye gang that gate. You’ve been into the very ante-room of hell. And you a man of poseetion, that should be an example to all of us! But there is time—there is time for you to hold back—you may escape destruction yet. There’s a meeting of the Rechabites to-morrow night, and if ye’d come with me, ye might be persuaded to join us. Drink is a terrible thing, but it can be mastered——’”

Mr. McFadyen suddenly broke off.

"Ay, do ye think it is a laughing matter, Miss Jessie?" he demanded—for Jess had been quietly giggling to herself. "That impudent drunken scoundrel!—and me, a town-councillor—and one o' the most temperate men in Duntroone. Find me a more temperate man than I am, in the whole of Duntroone—and I'll eat him!"

"Poor Lauchie!" said the little widow, with easy compassion. "Sometimes I think he is going to keep on the straight road; and maybe he is that way now; but I am never very sanguinary——"

"Sanguine, you mean, mother!"

"Ay, just that. You can never be sure about Lauchie. And it's a bad sign when he takes to the preaching. It's a sign he is likely to break out again. But he's not a bad kind of man, Lauchie: there's many a worse man than Lauchie."

Now the town-councillor, when he had made his protest, and asserted his dignity, had no mind to let Jess Maclean think that he was one to bear ill-will; he dismissed the subject of Long Lauchie altogether; and very soon he was giving his audience, with many chucklings of satisfaction, a description

of how he had that very afternoon triumphed over all his opponents at throwing the hammer in his backyard. Nevertheless he did not wholly monopolise the conversation; and the chubby and chirrupy little man was sharp-sighted enough; it was not long ere he perceived that now, when the school-master addressed Barbara Maclean, she turned to him with a kindly and friendly attention she had never hitherto paid him. And did not Jess notice? Ay, and Mrs. Maclean? As for Peter, he was delighted. If this was the way things were going, so much the better for his own daring schemes.

“Dod, man, Allan,” said he, as these two were walking home, through a somewhat wet and blustering night, “ye’re on the track at last. Ye’ve made your mark. You’ll have her. She’s yours—if you’ve the courage to go in and win. I can see it. I’m not blind. The lass is well-disposed towards ye. But ye’ll have to speak—ye’ll have to speak, man!——”

“I understand what ye mean, Mr. McFadyen,” said Henderson, in his grave and deliberate fashion. “But these are hardly matters to be guessed at in so light a way. One must not hope for too much, merely on

account of a little friendliness. And even if what you say were possible, there are many perplexities around me and ahead of me. It's all very well for you that have a fine position, an assured position, to talk in the heroic strain; but I have to consider that I might be dragging into misery, and uncertainty, and wretchedness, one that's of far more importance than myself——"

"No, no, man!" returned the sprightly councillor. "Ye take far too serious a view of life. Young folk must have courage and run risks. And if you don't, why, in the case of a handsome lass like that, somebody else will be coming along and snapping her up. Here, Allan, lad," he said, halting—for they had just arrived at his dwelling-house, which adjoined his office. "Ye'll just come in and sit down for a few minutes, for I've something to say to ye that may be of importance to ye by-and-bye."

The young man did not refuse. He had no great love for McFadyen—in fact he was rather inclined to treat him with impatience and disdain; but there were momentous issues at stake; and perhaps some talk with this older man, who had seen more of the world, might make matters a little clearer.

So he waited until Peter fumbled in his pockets for his latch-key—both of them no doubt looking forward to a quiet and confidential chat, perhaps with some little solace of tobacco.

There was to be no such thing, at this time and place. McFadyen put the key in the lock, turned it, and was about to enter, when immediately behind the door there was a low and savage growl. He sprang back incontinently, dragging the door to with him.

“Lord’s sake alive!” he exclaimed, when he had partly recovered himself. “It’s that dog!”

“What dog?”

“The bull-dog I bought from Jamie Nicholson yesterday; and it was to be sent home this afternoon; and that idiot of a servant-lass seems to have left it free in the house instead of tying it up in the backyard. What’s to be done? It’s a fearfu’ beast. Some rascals have been stealing my coals, and I thought I would pay them out——”

“And the dog is strange to you?”

“I never saw it but three minutes yesterday,” said the distressed councillor, “and it would not know me from Adam, even if the house was not in darkness!”

Here the schoolmaster broke into one of those portentous guffaws that had so perplexed Jess Maclean ; he roared and laughed ; he better roared and laughed ; while the councillor's temper, amid all his distractions, began to grow warm.

"A man shut out of his house by his own dog!" Allan cried, with another prodigious fit of laughter. "Well, there's but the one thing for it. Maybe he'll recognise you as the master of the place. Go boldly by him——"

"Go boldly by him yourself!" retorted the councillor angrily.

"But you cannot stand in the street all night! Where's the maidservant?"

"She's in her bed long ago!"

"Well, then, you must go round by the back and get in that way."

"How can I? What's the use of talking nonsense?" answered McFadyen, with savage fretfulness. "Do you think I would leave my coal-ree open, when I got this infernal beast for the very purpose o' protecting it? And the key of the gate's in the office; there's no way round by the back at all!"

"Well, then," said Allan, "you'll have to try gentleness. Go in a little bit, and try to humour him——"

“Go in a little bit yourself, if you’re so clever!” said the councillor, peevishly.

“What are you going to do? Or will you ask the policeman’s advice?—there’s sure to be a policeman round by the station.”

“I would not allow any policeman to go into that passage—it’s as much as his life would be worth!” Peter rejoined in his despair.

“You’ll have to send for the man who sold the dog to you.”

“Yes!—very likely!—and him at Taynuilt! He went back to Taynuilt yesterday afternoon.”

“Very well,” said Allan, more seriously, “I’ll tell you what we’ll do. You cannot stand in front of this house all night. You’ll just come along to my room, and you can have my bed, and I’ll get a shake-down, or a chair’s good enough for me in any case. For you were kind enough, Mr. McFadyen, to hint that there was something you had to say to me; and if it affects what you and I were talking about, I would rather hear of it before going to sleep. It’s an anxious time with me. There is not much hospitality I can offer you; but you are welcome.”

“Have you plenty of tobacco, Allan?” the

councillor asked, still regarding his own impossible door.

"Yes, I have that," responded the younger man. "It's the one thing I can offer you."

"Well and good, then," said he; but before he turned away to follow his companion, and while he was still contemplating the shut door, he added, bitterly: "You'll see if I haven't that beast chained up to-morrow, if there's a blacksmith in Duntroone can fasten a rivet into a stone wall."

* * * * *

Meanwhile the two girls and Mrs. Maclean had shut the shop, and gone over the way, and partaken of their frugal supper, and were now enjoying a friendly chat along with their needlework and knitting. Barbara was evidently greatly elated over her present, and was more talkative than usual; and Jess, who knew not grudging, was cheerfully responsive. Then the little widow kept throwing out merry and mysterious hints.

"Ay, indeed, Barbara," said she, as she was busy with her needle, "ye may well set yourself up. There may be more in that present than you're dreaming of yet. For Allan Henderson has so far paid but little

heed to the young lasses about; and they've rather been inclined to look asklant at him, and toss their head, for you know the old saying: '*Crone, will you have the king? I will not, as he won't have me.*' And so the king has thrown the handkerchief at last, has he? Well, well! And what will they say now, all them he has passed over? Not a lass in Duntroone good enough for him, but the minute one comes in from the outer isles, the misan—the misanthrope comes out of his cell, and all the world is changed, and there's a miracle for you! Well, well, indeed!"

And so she went on, and Jess listened in silence. For the girl had long ago given up any secret and wistful hope that Allan might look her way; nay, she had argued and steeled herself into the belief that she ought to set herself resolutely against any such thing, even if it were possible. She had formed other plans for him: she knew something of his ambitions. Duntroone was no place for him. He was to go away; he was to win to the front; he was to conquer London; and when he was become a great man and famous, perhaps he might have a single backward and friendly thought for

that cousin Jess who had believed in him and urged him on. And in the meantime, and with pride and with a warm sisterly affection she would watch his career.

Apparently this was a very happy evening. But that same night, in the mid-watches, in the darkness, Jess was lying awake. And at such times the nerves are apt to get unstrung and fall away from their ordinary firmness; self-control is not so easy; and certain dreams that she had been ready enough to sacrifice in her auguries of his great future would come back unbidden. Also some lines she had read in an American magazine, that had seemed to her to have in them a curious suggestion of Celtic remoteness, and solitariness, and longing. Why would the Irish girl's song so haunt her brain?—

"I try to knead and spin, but my life is low the while;
Oh, I long to be alone, and walk abroad a mile;
Yet when I walk alone, and think of naught at all,
Why from me that's young should the wild tears fall?

The cabin door looks down a furze-lighted hill,
And far as Leighlin cross the fields are green and
still;

But once I hear a blackbird in Leighlin hedges call,
The foolishness is on me, and the wild tears fall!"

Well, the 'foolishness' was on her; and she buried her head in the pillow, that was soaked with her tears; and she made desperate efforts to subdue her sobbing. For Barbara was in the other bed; and she would not awaken Barbara with this unavailing grief. Barbara, who was no doubt placidly dreaming of drapers' windows and black glass bugles.

CHAPTER XII.

IN SORE STRAITS.

THE apartment into which the schoolmaster ushered his guest bore evidence of a hard and rigid economy, not to say downright penury. There was no fire in the grate; there was but the one gas jet; the furniture was scant and bare. There were piles of books, to be sure; but they were all work-like volumes; not a gay binding amongst them.

“Now this is what I like to see,” said McFadyen, rubbing his hands with satisfaction as he took a seat and looked around. “This is what I like to see. And I know what it means. When I observe a young man that’s sober and industrious, and that has got a reasonable salary, when I observe him living pinched and poor, then I know what it means : he’s saving up to get married.”

“It has not been like that with me, then, Mr. McFadyen,” the younger man said, as he produced a small jar of tobacco, the only luxury in the place. “I’ve had to pay back to my folks at home what they lent me for the classes—and that was the least part of what I owed and owe them. And then I undertook the schooling of my two younger brothers; but one of them has just got a situation, and the other one will soon be looking about too; so that I may find myself a little freer——”

“Exactly that!” said the councillor, cheerfully. “Something freer to tackle the great problem—the choosing yourself a mate. It’s what we are all bent on, though some may be a little later than others——”

“And it will have to be a little later, if ever, with me,” rejoined Allan—who was in an unusually confidential mood: he did not often deign to speak of his private affairs. “In my position how could I ask any young girl to take such a risk?”

“God bless my soul!” cried the other, “did ye never hear of such a thing as life-insurance?”

“That is some safeguard for the future, no doubt. But the question is as to the

meantime. And if I were to ask any girl to look my way, I should have to tell her my present prospects; and what inducement could I lay before her——?”

“Tuts, tuts, tuts, man!” broke in the happy and hopeful Peter. “That’s no the way to talk! Do ye think a young lass is to be won over by a parade of gilded furniture? It’s not that she has in her mind when her fancy settles on a lad. Na, na. It’s not that will tempt her to kilt up her coats o’ green satin, like Leezie Lindsay, and be off with him through bush and briar. It’s love well won, and the world well lost—that’s more like the ticket, man! Prospects? Life-insurance? Is that what you think she has in her mind? Is that what she answers when he asks her the great question? Not a bit. This is more like what her answer’ll be—” And here the councillor raised his hand triumphantly, and sang in a brave fashion, and with many trills—

‘Gang down the burn, Davie, love,
Down the burn, Davie, love,
Gang down the burn, Davie, love,
And I will follow thee!’

Then Peter moderated his enthusiasm.

“Listen to me, Allan. I will not conceal

from ye that I sometimes thought ye had other intentions, when ye came so much about the widow's shop. And then again I said to myself, No, it was only that you were related to the family, and maybe you had not too many friends in the town, and it was but natural ye should foregather with your own kith and kin. And yet again I would say to myself, Yes, there's danger: he's a young man, he has eyes, he cannot fail to see what a fine creature Jessie Maclean is—so good-humoured, and clever, and bright-looking—just one in twenty thousand——”

“You may say that, Mr. McFadyen,” observed the young schoolmaster, gravely. “Ay, or one in fifty thousand.”

“But now that I see your thoughts are turned in another direction,” continued the councillor, “it's a great relief to me; for, to tell you the truth, I'm not without hopes that I might get Jessie for myself. That would be a fine ploy, wouldn't it?—the two weddings on the same day! And I'll tell ye what I'll do with ye, Allan, lad, just to ‘mak sikker.’ Mrs. Maclean says your best chance is to get married, and start a boarding-house for scholars sent in from the country.

And that would need some little capital—the plenishing and what not. Very well; I'm not a rich man; but I have a bit of a nest-egg laid by; and I wouldna mind lending you £50, or even £100, to help you at the start. And I'm sure if there was an understanding between Jessie and me, she would not grudge it either. She's a half-cousin of yours; and you've been great friends together; I'm sure she would not object——”

A quick flush had come over Allan's forehead.

“I thank ye, I thank ye, Mr. McFadyen,” he said, hastily, and with lowering brows. “But it is not to be thought of.”

And therewith he closed his mouth and would say no further word about these poor affairs of his: so that Peter, who was evidently in a state of buoyant anticipation, was forced to talk about his own share in this great project, and to describe those personal qualifications—physical strength, skill, tact, knowledge of the world, and the like—which, as he contended, were fairly entitled to put the mere question of years aside. And then, becoming still more sanguine, he grew enthusiastic over the delights

of courtship, and the enchantments of love's young dream.

Now although Allan Henderson had somewhat rudely and abruptly repulsed this friendly offer, it was nevertheless a wonderful thing for him to think of that one or two onlookers had actually been considering the possibility of Barbara's being favourably inclined towards him. All through the uncongenial toil of the next day there ran as it were little flashes of roseate flame; his eyes would become blind to those monotonous forms and their occupants; the grey hours had occasional startling moments when the outside world was revealed to him as in a vivid dream. And when at last it was all over, when he could emerge into the clearer air, instead of returning to his lodging, he struck away on a solitary ramble by sea and shore: there was a lifetime of contingencies to be faced and resolutely examined, so long as that was possible while those quivering, rose-tinted flashes — those fascinating and elusive will-o'-the-wisps — would break in upon his sight and bewilder him.

He left the town by way of the harbour, climbed the Gallows Hill, and proceeded along the edge of the steep cliffs overlooking

the sea. The rain of the previous night and morning had long ago ceased; the clouds were now banked up; there was a brooding silence; the click of the oars of a small boat crossing the bay could be distinctly heard, even at this height. And in the prevailing calm of sky and sea and mountain there was something that seemed in a measure to allay the agitation of his mind; there was peace in those great spaces of the universe; a quiet that conduced to a serener and saner contemplation. Wild hopes were dazzling and exciting things, no doubt; but the destruction of them could also be met and endured, by a man.

As it chanced, he had been so profoundly plunged in these meditations that he had followed the coast-line too mechanically, and now he came to the brink of a chasm that struck inland for some little way. He did not think it worth while going round in order to continue his route; instead he sat down on the verge of this deep cavity, letting his legs dangle over; and there he gave himself up to still further wrestling with the problems and distractions that beset him. For one thing, if he were to incur these great responsibilities, he would have to give

up many cherished ambitions—some snatch of foreign travel—the issue of his version of the Nibelungenlied—and the like: towards which he had been hoarding up his savings. But after all, what were such trivial considerations when compared with the very crown and joy of life, supposing that were now to be put within his reach? He could hardly believe it possible. He had been bewildered out of his calmer judgment by this sudden friendliness she had shown him during but one evening. Was it not too much to hope for that the one creature in the world whom he longed to have for his life-companion should on her part turn towards him and choose him out from amongst all others? How could such a thing happen? It was incredible. It was too marvellous a coincidence. Yet what of the marriages of the people he saw around him? In what proportion of cases—or in every case—had the man and the woman found each other in this inscrutable, inexplicable way?

And so, with his under lip firmly set, his forehead drawn together, and his eyes distant, he sate and pondered; until at length he appeared to make an effort to throw off this weight of thinking in a

determination to arise and get home: it was long past the hour for his chief daily meal. But at this moment, whether it was that his foot had been resting on some loose stone, or that his leg had got benumbed, as he attempted to get up something seemed to give way beneath him, and the next instant he found himself slipping down a few inches. He caught at the nearest object—it was a small rowan bush—to steady himself; but the bush came away in his grasp: nay, this very movement appeared to make his case worse, and he felt himself helplessly going. Then he threw himself back, and thrust out both hands in some desperate endeavour to grip anything that would check his descent; he clutched and clung, but all to no purpose, for the sides of this chasm were almost sheer; and the next thing he knew—or half-knew—was that he was hurtling down into this black hole—then came a dull crash—a sharp agony of pain—then silence—and a strange, not unblissful sinking out of consciousness.

When he came to himself again, stunned and dazed, he slowly and gradually became aware of his position. He was at the bottom of one of those fissures in the conglomerate rock that abound along this coast, and that

mostly run down to the sea. This one also trended towards the shore; but there was no escape for him that way; for the mouth of the cavern was barred by an enormous mass of the same rock. However, he was not much alarmed. He would be able to scramble up again, somewhere or other. The sides of the chasm, if they were steep, were not at all bare; there was a kind of stunted vegetation—bits of rowan bushes, heather, birch, and broom—between him and the strip of daylight; he would choose his upward path when his head was a little clearer.

Then he essayed to rise; but to his consternation he found himself incapable of movement, or only of such movement as caused him indescribable torture. The truth flashed in on him. Something was broken. And then for a moment a frantic resolve to get out of this death-trap possessed him—at any cost of agony he must win up to the open again—surely he could drag the broken limb from point to point, until his fingers clasped the edge, and he could raise himself into the blessed freedom of the outer world. And again and again he tried, making superhuman efforts, and again and again he was baffled by overmastering pain; until he sank

back exhausted and half-despairing on his narrow bed of withered and sodden fern.

Thus he lay for a while spent and done ; but of a sudden something occurred that caused his heart to leap. There was a sound in the road below—the road that skirted the shore ; the footfalls drew nearer ; he could even in a dull kind of way hear voices—apparently the voices of two men. Surely this meant rescue for him. And when he judged that the men were about opposite to him, he called and shouted ; but even as he did so he had a dreadful consciousness that the shouts were muffled—that they did not seem to travel out of this cavern. Nevertheless he continued to call as loudly as he could ; until the footfalls gradually ceased ; and he was left once more with silence, and the gathering over of the twilight.

He began to reason with himself against unnecessary dismay. He was not much more than two miles from the town. Some children would be sure to come wandering along, if not this evening then on the following morning or afternoon. Or a shepherd's dog would discover him, and its barking would fetch its master to his aid. Or surely, when his friends missed him from his usual

haunts, they would organise a search-party. So long as he retained some power of calling to any chance passer-by, he would not abandon himself to despair : whatever might happen, a stout heart could not harm.

Night came early over this deep gap ; and the darkness seemed to last for ever and ever. He listened to the moaning of the wind in the bushes overhead, and to the long-protracted hiss of the waves along the shore. Towards morning—he guessed it must be towards morning, after those immeasurable hours—a few small silver points began to glimmer in the black opening above ; but the starlight was of little use to him except in so far as it showed the skies were clearing. Further hours, as it seemed to him, passed ; and then, with a great rejoicing and re-awakening of hope, he perceived that the dawn was really drawing near. Stealthily, imperceptibly, such strip of the heavens as he could see became of a pearly blue-grey. A little while, and that was more opalescent in tone. Again, a touch of saffron appeared—soft, and distant, and luminous : some bit of slowly-moving vapour looking over to the opening east. Finally the new day declared itself, in a splendour of mottled rose-grey

clouds—and he thought of the happy folk in Duntroone.

No, he would not give in. Down here in the cold-hued twilight, amid the livid greens and the wet russet of the bracken, there were thin threads of half-melted snow here and there; and some of these he could reach; and very welcome was the chill moisture to his parched lips. Then again, as the morning wore on, there was the distraction of listening to the occasional faint sounds in the road below; but he had abandoned all hope of aid from that quarter; he knew he could not make himself heard. His only chance was in attracting the attention of some one passing along the summit of the cliffs; and so from time to time, at random, he called aloud, and paused to listen. But hour after hour went by, and no one came near. At times he grew faint. There was an odour from some decayed herb—St. John's-wort, most likely—that seemed to stifle him. Now and again it appeared to him that he was becoming light-headed; the strangest fancies crowded into his brain; he was possessed with a wild desire to shout songs—students' songs: *Gaudeamus—Vive la compagnie—* and even dafter ditties than these—*O*

tempora! O mores!—Per secale obvenisset, Corpus corpori. He had had no food since the previous morning; his wild efforts to drag himself out of this abyss—the agony he had endured—had left him hopelessly weak; and now, with these delirious impulses and imaginations taking possession of him, he could only say to himself, “If my senses go from me, that will indeed be the end.”

And thus it was that when, some time during the afternoon, he saw a head cautiously protrude itself through the twigs and withered grass at the top of the chasm, he did not believe there was anything or anybody there. That was but another of the fantastic visions that had begun to haunt him. Nevertheless, he called out as hitherto he had been calling out at intervals—though now not so loudly as heretofore, for he was enfeebled and listless—

“Help! help!”

The head was instantly withdrawn. But at the very moment of its withdrawal something convinced him that it was a real human face that had been cautiously peering down, and that it was the face of Niall Gorach.

“Niall! Niall!” he cried, with all his remaining strength. “Come back! Come

back, man! Or go and fetch somebody! Tell them! Tell them I cannot move!"

There was no reappearance of that mysterious, peering and prying face; but he comforted himself with the fancy that the frightened Niall had ran away into the town, and that soon succour would be at hand. He waited, listening intently, minute after minute, half-hour after half-hour, hour after hour; and there was no sign. And again the night fell, and the dark.

But this blackness around him was no longer like the blackness of the previous night; it was all filled with light and colour and moving phantasms; there were sounds of music also, some mournful, some gay. Jess Maclean brought him a pitcher of ice-cold water, and he drank and drank, and thanked her, and he did not know why she was crying. Barbara Maclean hung back a little; and he tried to speak to her; but could not. McFadyen came to him with a copy of a great review in his hand; there was an article in it on the new translation of the Nibelungenlied; it was a friendly writing. Again there were students singing in a room in Glasgow—there was a roaring chorus: "*The Old Folks at Home*"—then some one

sang “ *Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig sein !* ”—
and this phrase kept repeating itself more
and more distantly and softly—*magst ruhig
sein—magst ruhig sein*—until the lights grew
dim—and the apparitions vanished—and there
was silence—and oblivion.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE DEEPS.

NEXT day about noon Niall Gorach put his head into the little crib of a shop where Long Lauchie was engaged at his cobbling.

“Mr. MacIntyre,” said he, in a pleading kind of way, “will ye gie me a piece of leather to make a sooker?”

Lauchie looked up only for a second.

“Away wi’ ye, ye idle vagabond!” he said, sullenly. “Better ye would take to some work than come asking for children’s playthings. Away wi’ ye!”

The half-witted lad had probably expected this rebuff. But he did not go away. On the contrary, with a cautious look round, he advanced a step; and then he said, in a mysterious voice—

“Mr. MacIntyre, if ye’ll gie me the piece

of leather, I'll show ye the opening into the Bad Place."

"Ay, ye'll find yourself there soon enough!" said the shoemaker, grimly.

"But I'll show it to ye," continued Niall, with his eyes longingly fixed on the scraps of leather lying about the floor. "And they've got Henderson the schoolmaster there: if ye go near enough, ye'll hear him crying out."

"What's that ye say?" exclaimed the now startled Lauchie—for, like all the rest of Duntroone, he had heard of the inexplicable disappearance of the young schoolmaster. "What's that ye say about Henderson—Allan Henderson, do you mean?"

"Ay, just that," said Niall. "They've got him in the Bad Place, and ye'll hear him crying for help, away down below. And I'll show ye where it is, and there's flames and brimstone, and little devils running about wi' their pitchforks, and the Big Devil, too, and he has fire coming out of his mouth——"

By this time Long Lauchie was on his feet.

"I'm no sure what to believe o' your haverings," he said, and he paused irresolutely, revolving possibilities in his mind.

“Do ye mean to tell me that you actually heard Allan Henderson crying out somewhere?”

“Ay, that I did!” answered Niall eagerly—he saw the ‘sooker’ coming within reach.

“Where, then?”

“It’s a black hole away down past the Gallows Hill. It’s the opening into the Bad Place——”

“Come away this minute,” said the shoemaker, reaching over for his cap.

“But I’ll no go near—I’ll no go near!” cried Niall, shrinking back. “There’s the Big Devil—and the flames——”

“Ye’ll take me to the very spot,” said the shoemaker, peremptorily. “And if I find ye’ve been telling me lies, I’ll give ye the finest leathrin’ you ever got in your life. And that will be better for you than playing with a sooker.”

It was an unlucky threat; for as they set out it was plain that daft Niall followed with the greatest unwillingness: there was a curious, furtive look in his eyes as if he were watching for the first opportunity of escape. But in the meantime Long Lauchlan was a proud man. Had it been reserved for him, then, to discover the missing schoolmaster,

while all the others had been searching about and telegraphing in vain? And if that were so, was it not owing to his shrewdness in perceiving that there might be some basis of fact in the murky imaginings of this half-witted gangrel? Lauchie saw himself rising in the esteem of Duntroone, and stepped out boldly.

And then—for they had to go round by the railway-station and the quay to get to the Gallows Hill—his glance happened to light on the red baize door of the refreshment-room. It was a terrible temptation; and instantly all sorts of devil's logic leapt into his brain. Was not this a great occurrence? Ought he not to fortify himself against whatever might befall by swallowing a good, stiff dram? It is true that his conscience as a Rechabite said No. But what was this conscience, after all—this unbidden and unwelcome guest? His conscience was only a part of himself; whereas he was the whole; and surely the whole is greater than any part? Why should he be dictated to by any mere section of himself? Besides, the whisky of that refreshment-room was a most superior whisky. And arduous duties might be demanded of him, if the poor lad

Allan had chanced into trouble. And—and—— Then of a sudden he shut his lips firm and hard; he kept his eyes straight before him; and walking stiffly and erect he got safely past the station.

The next moment, however, he awoke to the fact that his companion had vanished. He looked everywhere around; there was no Niall visible. He could not at all understand this piece of deviltry, until his wandering gaze fell on the bridge they had crossed in coming along—a bridge that here spans a burn, or rather an open ditch; and it occurred to him that perhaps the young rascal had slipped over the parapet, clambered down, and hidden himself in that unsavoury refuge. He hurried back. He searched hither and thither. At length he saw two elfish eyes peering from under the archway.

“Come out o’ that, ye limb o’ Satan!” he called angrily. “Come out o’ that, will ye?”

Instead there was an instant disappearance. And then the baffled and irate shoemaker began to pick up stones from the road; and these he endeavoured to shy into that dusky recess. But it was an awkward angle; most of the missiles struck the bridge; and at last,

seeing there was nothing else for it, Long Lauchie had himself to get over, and scramble down, and make for the twilight of the arch. When at last he had dragged Niall out by the scruff of the neck, and had him up into the open air again, he said—

“That’s one leatherin’ I owe ye; and maybe there’ll be six more before the day’s done. Ye imp o’ Satan, wi’ your witch’s tricks! But wait till I get ye home again, I’ll give ye something better than a sooker—ay, ay, I’ll give ye something better than a sooker!”

And thereafter he drove him on in front, the better to keep an eye on him; and in this wise they climbed the Gallows Hill, and made their way along the summit of the cliffs.

In time Niall began to move more and more reluctantly; he was evidently creeping forward with much apprehension.

“Whereabouts now?” demanded the shoemaker.

The daft laddie pointed vaguely with his finger.

“Well, go on—go on, man! What are you feared of?” said the gloomy and impatient Lauchie.

"Maybe they'll come out," said Niall, in a whisper, and his eyes were staring ahead. "They hae grippit the schoolmaster, and maybe they'll come out for us. They can run quick, the small ones, though there's no so much flame about them."

"Get on, man, get on!—and let me see the place where ye heard Henderson crying out," said Lauchie; and then he added, in a more persuasive tone, "And maybe there'll no be a leatherin' for ye at all. Maybe I'll make ye a fine big sooker, and when ye've got the string into it, and when ye've soaked it, it will be strong enough to lift a paving stone out o' the street. Think o' that, now!"

But Niall was no longer occupied with playthings. His eyes were full of dread—and his brain was full of cunning.

"Stand still," he said, in the same cautious whisper, "stand still where ye are, and ye'll hear Henderson. The black hole is just along there. Stand still and listen." And as the shoemaker thoughtlessly obeyed—with his own eyes thrown forward—Niall seized the opportunity to dart away from him, flying off with remarkable swiftness.

Long Lauchie uttered an imprecation, and

started in pursuit. But his cramped calling had left him little of a runner; whereas the half-witted creature had the speed of a roe and the agility of a wild-cat. Moreover, he had no intention of making this a race in the open. At a certain point he swerved towards the edge of the cliffs, and suddenly disappeared; and Lauchie, arriving a few moments later, found that he must have boldly attacked the descent, swinging from one leafless bush to another, until he reached the road below. Lauchie, under his breath, called down more curses, and in a morose mood set out to resume his researches alone. He was not quite sure now but that the imp had befooled him from the beginning.

Nevertheless, to satisfy his own mind, he went forward in the direction that Niall Gorach had indicated, spying everywhere about; and in a very brief space he came to the edge of the chasm. At first, in inspecting this deep gap, he could make out hardly anything; but in time, his eyes growing more accustomed, he thought there was some object of unusual blackness lying away down there, at the foot of the narrowing fissure. And the better to examine, he laid himself prone on the heather, just as Niall had done,

and pushed his head over the brink: the next moment he was convinced that the huddled black mass down there was human.

“Allan—Allan Henderson—is that you?” he called aloud.

Then he was silent, and awe-stricken. For there was no answer; and it seemed to him that he was in the presence of death. He stealthily retreated from the edge of the chasm, he regained his feet, he set out for Duntroone—something frightened, no doubt, but still considering rapidly in his own mind what ought now to be done.

He had to go round by the railway-station, and about the first person he met was Mr. Gilmour, who promptly offered to send a couple of his men, with a coil of rope. But Lauchie deemed it advisable to go on and tell his tale at the police-station, and there the sergeant on duty at once ordered two of the officers to get ready a stretcher and coverlet. Finally, Lauchie, after a good deal of tracking from house to house, succeeded in discovering the doctor; and the doctor, on hearing the story, immediately went home to provide himself with some splints, cotton wool, bandages, and the like, and also a flask of brandy. Thus equipped,

the little posse comitatus set out, Long Lauchie being guide. And it ought to be noted that in these hurryings to and fro the shoemaker had to pass the red baize door of the refreshment-room no fewer than four times, yet not once did he succumb. With clenched mouth and immovable head he went resolutely by—human weakness only revealing itself, after each achievement, in a long, sad sigh of resignation.

It turned out that one of the railway-servants had been a sailor; and when they arrived at the deep cleft in the rock, he volunteered to descend. And a tedious and difficult business it was to get this limp and insensible body hoisted carefully into the upper air; but at last the hapless young schoolmaster lay extended on the heather; and the doctor proceeded to his examination. The faintest moan now and again was the only sign of life lingering in that prostrate form; there was no movement—not even a twitch of agony as the doctor was passing his hand over this or that limb, to ascertain the whereabouts of any fracture: his eyes were closed as in profoundest sleep.

And meanwhile there were two other persons who had heard of this discovery and

were now hurrying out from Duntroone. The one was a strongly-built elderly man, whose natural freshness of complexion was for the moment overmastered by a look of vague and anxious alarm; the other, also with apprehension written in every line of her face, was Jess Maclean. They hardly spoke to each other; their thoughts were too intent on what might be awaiting them ahead. And thus they hastened round by the harbour; they ascended the Gallows Hill; they got out on to the bleak and open and undulating moorland. It was a picture of utter desolation: for the afternoon had turned out wild and wet and squally; the livid green waters of the Sound were dark and driven; the heather bent in waves before the blasts of wind; the sea-gulls were calling and screaming in the gusty and lowering skies. But into this picture of loneliness and gloom there came something still more sombre—a small black group of figures who seemed to be carefully carrying some horizontal object. It looked so like a funeral procession that Jess Maclean uttered a piteous little exclamation, and laid a trembling hand on her companion's arm; but this man with the haggard eyes and the now almost

bloodless face, did not pause; he went forward, perhaps a little more slowly; and Jess accompanied him, their gaze fixed upon that gradually advancing train.

The doctor had lingered behind, by the side of the chasm, to gather together his surgical appliances, and the station-master had remained with him. None the less, when the men who were bringing along this sad burden arrived at the spot where the new-comers were now standing, they did not wait for orders; instinctively they came to a halt; they guessed that the stranger who was with Jessie Maclean must be the young man's father. And at the first glimpse of the grey and lifeless features, and the hand hanging limp and loose from under the coverlet, a spasm of agony crossed the father's face; he seemed paralysed; he could not step forward, nor did he ask any question; with shaking fingers he reverently removed his hat from his head; and as he did so, he murmured something to himself:

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord. But it will bear hard on the lad's mother."

It was Jess who came to his aid. She advanced timidly; she took the hand that

hung so limply there ; and the next moment she gave a slight short cry.

“He lives!—Uncle, he lives!—there is hope for us!” And at this moment the doctor came up. “Doctor,” she said, with tears swimming in her eyes, “is there a chance for him?—is there hope for us?”

“Indeed yes, indeed yes,” the doctor made answer. “Go on, lads, go on ; but gently. Indeed yes,” he resumed, turning to Jess. “Lying out for two days and nights in this cold and wet weather is bad enough ; and the poor lad has been smashed about sadly ; but I know Allan—I know him well—he’s as hard as nails when he gives himself fair treatment. And we’ll see him through this, or I’m mistaken. There’s not so much damage done—a simple fracture of the leg and a sprained foot ; but there’s the extreme exhaustion, of course. Well, we must hope for the best, Miss Maclean.”

“Where are you taking him to now, sir?” Allan’s father asked.

“To the poor-house hospital,” was the answer. “It’s not the best that could be desired ; but it’s the only hospital we’ve got.”

“His mother will be sore grieved to hear

that," the older man said. "There's never been one of the family near a poor-house; and this one—this one was just the pride of her life."

"It is mainly a question of attendance," observed the doctor. "If you would prefer that your son should be taken to his own lodgings, maybe I could make some arrangement——"

"Could I be of any use, Doctor?" Jess interposed, diffidently and yet anxiously.

"Would you be willing to help?" he said, at once turning to her.

"Ay, that I would!—that I would!" said she, with an involuntary tremor of the lip.

"Very well—very well," said he; and he stepped on to give the men altered directions.

They were now come to the top of the Gallows Hill, the descent from which had to be managed with the greatest caution. When, at length, they arrived at the foot of the steep incline, the doctor was not surprised to discover that Jessie Maclean was no longer of the company; he thought it but natural she should wish to avoid the publicity of walking through the town with this funeral-like cortège; and assumed that she had gone on ahead to her own home.

He was mistaken. She had gone on ahead, it is true, and with great swiftness; but it was to Allan Henderson's lodging. And when at last the doctor and his charge arrived, it was clear how busy and alert and dexterous she had been in the interval. Allan's own room was all smartly tidied up; the gas lit—for the dusk had fallen now; a coal fire burning briskly in the grate; the bed carefully made and folded down. Moreover, she had requisitioned the adjacent room, which chanced to be vacant; and here also the gas was lit; while a wicker-work easy-chair had been brought in, for the convenience of any nurse who might want to sit up, and read, and listen. The doctor, busy as he was, looked round, and nodded approval.

* * * * *

Later on that evening Long Lauchie the shoemaker and an old crony of his, Donald Crane—that is to say, Donald that worked the crane at the quay, his real name being Donald Macdonald—were seated together in a corner of a favourite howff of theirs; and Lauchlan was happy. It was the stupidity of the people of Duntroone that seemed to be amusing him most; he laughed

and chuckled to himself; while there were glasses and a pewter measure on the table before him that ought not to have been there.

“Donald,” said he, in Gaelic, to the crane-worker—and the crane-worker was a thin little hard man, with a thin hard red face and steel-blue eyes—“Donald, it is you that have some knowledge in your head. But the other people in Duntroone—well, I will give you my opinion about the other people in Duntroone; and it is this—that they were not at home when the sense was shared. To go seeking away along the shore; when the schoolmaster was not a sailor, nor a fisherman, and when it was known he had not taken a boat anywhere: was not that the work of fools? And for a poor idiot lad to get the better of them—well, I am laughing at that, and no mistake! Donald,” he went on, suddenly pretending to be sober, “are you not coming up to Fort William with me to-morrow? You will see something: aw, as sure as death you will see something worth while! For I am going to smash the head of the carpenter. I do not want my wife back; and I will not take her back; but it is the head of the carpenter I

am going to smash for him—aw, Dyea, will not that be a pretty sight!” He laughed again and again, softly and quietly, in humorous anticipation; then he made a grasp at the pewter measure, but found it empty. “Donald, my noble hero, we will now have another mutchkin—ay, by the piper of Moses, we will have another mutchkin—and I will drink your health. Donald, it is you that are the son of my heart; and it is you that are coming to Fort William with me; and we will see if there is not a drop of Long John left somewhere about in Lochaber!”

He reached over, and rang the bell; and a servant-lass appeared. Long Lauchie had broken out with a vengeance this time.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISITOR.

So Jess was installed as nurse; and the 'foolishness' was no longer upon her; she was brisk and active and cheerful—especially cheerful when she saw that the care she bestowed on this intractable patient was being rewarded by a steady convalescence. For the young man had naturally a tough and wiry physique, if only he had allowed it a little more nourishment and a little less tobacco; and now there was no tobacco, while there was as much nourishment as was deemed prudent; and the progress made was in every way satisfactory. But intractable he assuredly was. He fretted over the waste of time; he fretted over the expense of certain little delicacies which, as a matter of fact, never cost him a farthing, for they were

sent along out of the kindly thoughtfulness of Mrs. Maclean; and he fretted over the rules and regulations that Jess, under the doctor's orders, had to impose. Nay, to tell the truth, he was sometimes not over civil to Jess herself. But she only laughed.

"A grumbling patient is a recovering patient," she would say to the town-councillor, who called frequently.

It was not his grumbling that hurt her and opened old wounds. Oftentimes, when she went in to sit with him for half-an-hour, he would talk of nothing but her cousin Barbara; and the questions he asked showed clearly enough what was running in his mind, and what was the future towards which he was looking. He had got it into his head that a woman must necessarily know more of the character, and disposition, and views of a woman than a man possibly could; and when he was not himself talking about Barbara, he would have Jess talk of her; while Jess, in framing her replies to his questions, naturally could speak no word of Barbara that was not hearty commendation.

"And you say she has courage?" he proceeded, on one occasion. "You imagine

she would not be afraid to face straightened circumstances? ”

“As for that,” Jess responded, “she has faced nothing else all her life long!”

“Yes, perhaps,” he said, after a moment’s hesitation, “but I was thinking if she came to consider the question of marrying. She might very fairly look for some better position—some assurance as to the future: marriage is a big enough risk in any case, without any added uncertainty——”

“She would have to take her chance like other folk,” said Jess, a little tartly.

But Jess Maclean went and pondered over these things; and when in the evening she took him in his bit of light supper, she said—

“Now, Allan, you must not keep worrying about your circumstances and your future, as I think you do. It is merely that this accident has driven you to consider possibilities that are never likely to happen. You are none so ill off, as it is. Mr. McFadyen has made it all right with the School Board, and they’ve got a substitute, and you are to put aside all anxiety to get about again, until you are perfectly well and strong. Then there’s another thing. You must give

up the scheme about the boarding-house. It would never do. It would want a great deal of capital; and there would be a great responsibility; and if, as mother suggests, you thought of taking a wife to manage it for you, well, then, how could you go to a girl and say 'Will you become my house-keeper? I will marry you, so that you may look after my boarders?'"

As she spoke thus Jessie's fair and freckled face showed some colour; but she was determined to have her say out; she had more than a casual interest in this young man and his designs.

"Now this is what I would advise you, Allan, if you think it is not too impertinent of me to offer one like you advice on any matter at all. In a town like Duntroone there must be plenty of clever young lads, in the shops and the offices, who have never had any chance of the better kind of schooling, and perhaps some of them half-expecting to have a winter or two at college by-and-bye. Well, now, why not start a Latin class for those lads—from eight till half-past nine in the evening, or from half-past eight till ten? There would be no risk in it; there would be no expense except the rent of a big room, and

the gas, and the price of an advertisement in the *Duntroone Times and Telegraph*. They would buy their own grammar-books; and the fees would be all found money to you, once the rent was paid. Now will you consider that, if you must go planning and planning about the future?"

He was immensely grateful. And next morning, when she made her appearance, he said—

"Jessie, you are the wisest creature in the world—and the kindest. I have been lying awake half the night, considering what the advertisement should be, and wondering where I could get a room, and how long it might be before I could begin——"

"Oh, indeed!" said she. "Well, if it's going to lead to your lying awake at night, I'm not for intermeddling any more in your schemes—or for taking any interest in your affairs. Why should I?" she added, saucily.

"Why should you?" he repeated, with a friendly glance towards her. "Because I don't deserve it. That's the way of women."

And yet it was hard on Jess that she should be deputed to coax and persuade Barbara Maclean into paying him a visit.

For a considerable time he had kept this secret desire of his to himself; perhaps in the hope that Barbara would of her own accord come along to see him; perhaps through some fear that she might be unfavourably impressed by the poor and mean appearance of his dwelling. But the ideas of an invalid are pertinacious; they grow in importance through the long hours of thinking; and at last, with some little diffidence, he revealed to Jess what he was most of all longing for, and timidly asked her whether she thought such a thing was possible.

For a second Jess remained silent. Then she looked at him rather askance.

"Perhaps," said she, "perhaps you would like Barbara to take my place?"

He seemed startled by the suggestion—but only for a moment.

"No, no," said he, "I could not be so ungrateful. There's no one like you, Jessie; there's no one could be so kind, and forgiving, and good-humoured, in the face of all sorts of unreasonableness, and ill-temper, and ill-treatment——"

"Oh, you treat me well enough, if only you would treat yourself a little better," said Jess, bluntly. "I declare it's most provoking

to see you busying away with your books and papers and pencil, when it's stories you should be reading if you must read at all. I wish your mother were able to come through to Duntroone, to give you a talking to, for my scolding is no use—you pay no heed. Well, I am going along to the house now, to see if the blanc-mange is ready; and I will try and get Barbara to come back with me." And therewith she departed, leaving him to wait and lie and listen, anxiously and half-doubtingly and wonderingly, for the first sound of footsteps on the stairs without.

When Jess had gone along to the house and got ready the carrageen blanc-mange for conveyance to her patient, she turned to Barbara.

"Barbara," she said, "would you not like to go back with me now, and look in on Allan, and talk to him for a little while?"

Barbara hardly raised her eyes from her sewing.

"I am sure that would do no good," said she, unwillingly. "It would be more of an annoyance than anything else. And when he has the doctor, and the landlady, and you all looking after him, surely that is enough."

Jess hesitated. She would rather have avoided confessing that it was at Allan's express entreaty she was making this suggestion. But she saw no other way : Barbara was clearly indisposed to go.

"It would be a friendly thing on your part," she said ; "for it is very dull for him lying there day after day, and hardly seeing any one. And—and to tell you the truth, Barbara, he asked me to ask you. Come, now !—if it is only for a few minutes."

With evident reluctance the girl put her sewing aside ; she got up and fetched her out-of-door things ; and presently the two of them had left the house. But they had not gone over a hundred yards when something happened that effectually aroused Barbara from her apathetic acquiescence. There was a distant whistle, repeated again and again—the echo sounding along the shores of Kerrara ; and by-and-bye a steamer with flags flying came round the point of the mainland. Jessie's pretty and gentle grey eyes were keen-sighted as well.

"Barbara," said she, "you have been asking me sometimes when Jack Ogilvie was coming back to Duntroone. Well, now, if I am not mistaken, that is the *Aros*

Castle—they are going to put her on her station next week, to Tobermory and Strontian on Loch Sunart. And no doubt Ogilvie is on board of her at this minute.”

Barbara suddenly stood stock still.

“Will he be coming ashore? Will he be coming along through the town?” she demanded, hurriedly.

“Very likely,” said Jess. “The young man has plenty of friends.”

“Jessie,” said the other, quickly, “I have forgotten something: I must go back home for a few minutes. Will you come with me, or will you wait here?”

“I will wait here, then,” said Jess—for she was at the window of the stationer’s shop, and there were plenty of photographs for her to look at.

Then Barbara hastened away back and got to her room; and the first thing she did was to get out from a drawer the handsome *fichu* that Allan Henderson had given her. She whipped off her cloth jacket; she draped herself in that piece of finery; she put on her jacket again, leaving it partly open in front, so that at least a portion of the silk and the lace and the bugles remained visible. Next she went to the mirror, and rapidly

and yet carefully attended to her hair, regarding herself from various angles, and slow to be satisfied. From another drawer she took out a pair of kid gloves—whereas when she first set forth her hands had been bare; she provided herself with a silk parasol that she had borrowed on some occasion or another from Mrs. Maclean; she had a final look into the mirror at the set of her hat and its feather; and when she descended into the street, she was quite a smart young lady in appearance. The *Aros Castle* was now lying alongside the quay.

Jessie's quick eyes immediately perceived the change in her cousin's attire; and she said to herself, 'Now, that is a friendly thing to do: Allan will be pleased to see her wearing his present.' And when at length this beautiful creature entered his room, and went forward in rather a perfunctory way to give him her hand, and then retired to a seat a few yards back, the young schoolmaster was not only bewildered and entranced by the mere fact of her being there—by the occasional glance of those large, mystic, deep-blue eyes—he was also overjoyed to see that she wore his gift. He made no doubt it was a piece of kindly thoughtfulness on her part;

it was an indication of the amiability and sympathy of her nature; it was a token of goodwill that was worth all the world to him. He was so grateful to her for coming—so thrilled and enthralled by the sight of her—that he did not take particular heed of her silence, nor yet of the somewhat cold scrutiny with which she regarded the furniture of this meagre apartment.

Indeed he was all too anxious to interest and entertain her; and for that very reason he found it embarrassingly difficult. Small talk was not in his way. What he really longed to say was: ‘Do you know how wonderful and beautiful you are? Do you know that your sitting in that chair—even when you are silent—makes a kind of splendour in this poor room!’ But at least he managed to ask her if she had been to the recent practisings of the Gaelic Choir, and whether they had sung the *Fear a bhàta*, or *The Brown-haired Maid*, or any other of the songs familiar in the outer isles; and this led him on to speak of his lecture on the German Volkslieder, which had actually been announced for the 15th of the following month.

“And will you be quite well and going

about by that time ? ” she asked, turning her great, glorious eyes upon him.

“ Oh, yes, and before then, the doctor says,” he made answer.

“ I am very glad to hear it,” she said, rather listlessly—But he did not notice that : the sound of her voice was like music in his ear.

“ And I hope you will come to the lecture, Miss Barbara,” he went on, presently. “ The Committee of the Society have got the loan of the Masonic Hall, that has been all newly decorated—indeed they say now it is the most beautiful hall in all the west country—— ”

“ Oh, then, it is to be a very grand affair ? ” she said, with a trifle more of attention.

“ Well, not such a gay affair as Mr. McAskill’s dance,” said he, laughing, “ that I heard was a great sight for you. But we are to have dignities present. The rank and fashion of Duntroone have been very kind in sending for tickets ; and the Committee are trying to persuade the Provost to take the chair. Then I want the front row of seats, next the platform, kept for my own particular friends ; I should feel more at home that way ; and you and Jessie, if you are so kind as to come, must have seats there—Mr.

McFadyen will look after you—and I shall feel that I am among my own folk——”

“Allan, lad,” said Jess, who was placing a small refection on the little table by the side of the bed, “are you trying to persuade Barbara you are so shy and sensitive before an audience that you need private help and sympathy? Oh, yes, indeed! But I know better. I know. I’ve seen you preside over a meeting, more than once. And I’ve seen a dispute arise—cross-arguments, confusion, words flying; and then I’ve seen the chairman get up, with a face as black as thunder; and weren’t the quarrelsome folk pretty soon quieted down—ordered to the right about, and every one of them feeling he had made a fool of himself! It is not only in the school that the schoolmaster must lay down the law, and hector, and have everything his own way——”

“Jessie!” the young man remonstrated, blushing furiously. “What’s this you’re saying? What will Barbara think?”

“Keep your temper, Allan,” Jess responded, coolly. “If ye lost it, it would be a bad thing for the one that found it.”

At this point Barbara rose, intimating that it was now time for her to go; she advanced

to the bedside and bade him good-bye ; she said a word or two in passing to Jessie ; and with that she left.

“ There, you see, you’ve frightened her away with your nonsense ! ” he exclaimed, fretfully and angrily.

“ Better she should go now,” Jess said, in her usual placid way, “ before she got tired : she is all the more likely to come again.”

“ And do you think she will come again ? ” he asked, with a sudden alteration in his tone.

“ Why not ? ” answered Jess, good-naturedly. “ She is not kept over busy. I dare say she is away back home now to hem handkerchiefs for herself.”

However, Barbara Maclean had not returned home to resume her sewing. When she got outside, she lingered about the pavement, pretending to study the shopwindows, but in reality glancing furtively up and down the thoroughfare, with an occasional look across the bay towards a certain red-funnelled steamer moored at the opposite quay. After a while, and with an affectation of carelessness as though she hardly knew whither she was going, she proceeded along

the esplanade in the direction of the railway-station; and when she reached the railway-station, she went to the bookstall, and seemed to be wholly engrossed in contemplating the periodical literature displayed there. But close to the bookstall there is a large gateway opening on to the road that here skirts the harbour; and along this road any one coming either to or from the South Quay must necessarily pass, whether he chooses to look into the railway-station or not. And it was at the South Quay that the *Aros Castle* was now lying.

CHAPTER XV.

ENCOUNTERS.

LONG LAUHLAN the shoemaker did not at once put into execution his threat of going to Fort William to smash the head of the carpenter; but the idea remained hidden in the dim recesses of his brain; and one day, having provided himself with a soda-water bottle which was not filled with soda-water, he walked down to the quay, and stepped on board the *Fusilier*. There was no savage purpose visible in his face; on the contrary, he wore an expression of bland content; and when he had gone forward to the bow, and made himself comfortable in a corner, with his back resting against the bulwarks, he was laughing and talking to himself—chuckling over the folly of the contemporary race of mankind—smiling at his own grim

little jokes—and occasionally breaking into gentle song. For Lauchie had not as yet returned to the fold of the Rechabites; the rescue of the schoolmaster had been a great event; and ever since, with but a few intervals of unwilling labour, he had devoted himself to a “terrible keeping-up o’ the New Year.”

The gangway was withdrawn, the hawsers cast off, the paddles struck the green water into a seething white, and the steamer slowly moved away from the quay. Lauchie was now plaintively singing to himself—

‘There’s nae sorrow there, Jean,
There’s neither cauld nor care, Jean,
The day’s aye fair
In the Land o’ the Leal!’

“It’s a beautiful song—a beautiful, beautiful song,” he murmured. Then he burst out laughing. “That foolish idiot of a lass! ‘O Mr. MacIntyre, how dare you mention such a thing to me, and you a married man!’ And then says I: ‘But a man that has not got a wife is not a married man; and a man that is not married has as much right to get married as anyone else; and if that is not the law, then it is them that makes the law that have no sense in their head.’” He chuckled again, softly and gleefully. “‘O

Mr. MacIntyre, you should not say such things! I am quite frightened to hear you say such things!’” His merriment suddenly ceased. A diligent search had revealed the disastrous fact that in not one of his pockets could a single match be found. And so he was forced to struggle up from that snug corner, and make away for the cabin, where some friendly steward might give him a light for his pipe. And if—as he was in the cabin in any case—and there being a refreshment bar there—if he should take advantage of the opportunity—why——. But Lauchie had disappeared.

When the steamer reached Fort William, he was as blithe and unconcerned as ever; and though he said to himself ‘Aw, Dyea, I will make the bandy-legged carpenter dance a little dance!—I will make his bandy legs jump!’—it was said with perfect good humour. And in this happy mood he landed, passed along the quay, and entered the little town that lies at the foot of the great Ben Nevis. He knew that if he were to find the carpenter at all, he would find him alone; for MacKillop was in a very small way of business, ordinarily working as his own journeyman.

At length he turned into an alley, and came upon a yard filled with all sorts of rubbish—old barrels, broken boats, and sodden shavings—at the further end of which was a shed. The shed was empty; and there was no one about. But there was also a workshop; and without a moment's hesitation, Lauchie went over to it, and raised the latch, and opened the door. The next moment the two men were staring at each other—the one in paralysed alarm, the other with a grim sort of humour. Then Lauchie began to look about him for some instrument; and the little, bandy-legged, red-headed carpenter, instantly divining his enemy's purpose, and seeing no way of escape by the door, which was blocked by Lauchie's tall form, made a single spring for the window, and frantically tried to raise the lower sash. But he tugged and shook in vain, for in his haste he had forgotten to undo the catch; and meanwhile Lauchie had got hold of a portentous beam; so that the luckless carpenter, finding himself caught like a trapped rat, could only throw himself under the table at which he had been planing, in some desperate hope of shelter from the imminent blows. And these came quickly

enough; and thud after thud resounded of the unequal fray; but what with his laughing, and what with his somewhat unsteady gait, Lauchie's aim was uncertain.

"Aw, Dyea," he called aloud—but without the least apparent animosity—rather with a kind of hilarious enjoyment—"come out of your hole, you red-headed weasel, and I will smash your brains in!"—and therewith he aimed another blow at the carpenter which would undoubtedly have accomplished that object had it not fortunately descended on a crossbar supporting the table. "Come out from your shavings, will you, till I knock your head off your shoulders! Will you come out, now! Do you hear me? Do you think I have come ahl the way to Fort William for nothing? Come away, now! You red-headed weasel, will you come out from your hole?"

And again with a tremendous crash the beam descended—this time, happily, hitting the table itself. Lauchie laughed loudly.

"Aw, Dyea, that a weasel should be afraid to come out like that! Will I get the dogs and worry you out? But no—no, no!—you red-haired son of the devil, I will reach you

yet, if I have to keep hammering ahl the day long."

Then something tumultuous, amazing, inconceivable happened. Lauchie vaguely knew that the carpenter had darted out from his retreat and hurled himself against his (Lauchie's) legs; there was a wild scuffle and scramble; the carpenter managed to regain his feet and make for the door; and when the injured husband, seeking to pursue him and belabour him, would have followed, he, that is to say, Lauchlan MacIntyre, tripped over a plank of wood, he lurched heavily forward, he came down like a log, and there was a splintering crash of glass that told of an appalling and irremediable catastrophe.

For a time Lauchie lay motionless, while the peccant carpenter was fleeing away into safety. And when he slowly rose, there could be no doubt as to the calamity that had occurred; his nether garments were saturated; a pocket of his coat was filled with broken glass. More in sorrow than in anger, he pulled out these fragments of the soda-water bottle, and dropped them in the yard; then with an ever-increasing dejection he made his way along the chief thoroughfare

in the direction of the quay ; and it was a perfectly heart-broken man that seated himself on an empty herring-barrel, to await the return of the steamer from Corpach.

When Lauchlan stepped on board the *Fusilier*, on her homeward voyage, he looked neither to the right nor to the left, but went away forward and sate down, his naturally dismal countenance now heavy with gloom. It was at this moment that a little man dressed all in Sunday black, and with a tall hat on his head, came up to him and said, sympathetically—

“How are ye, Mr. MacIntyre? I’m afraid ye look rather down in the mouth.”

“I’ve had a sad loss, Mr. Robertson,” answered Lauchie—but he paid little heed to the Free Kirk elder, who was returning from Achnasheen, where he had been engaged with others in protesting against the Declaratory Act.

“So I have heard—so I have heard,” said the elder, with compassion: he knew the story of Lauchie’s domestic misfortunes.

“The best Glenlennan,” Lauchie murmured to himself.

“Do ye say that now?” rejoined the other.
“The best in all the glen, was she? It’s

grievous to think how time changes us poor mortal creatures ! ”

“Seven years in bond,” continued the doleful shoemaker.

“Indeed, indeed ! ” said the elder, shaking his head sadly. “Seven years in the bonds of iniquity. I had little idea there were such goings-on, over so long a time.”

“But there was no help for it—no help,” Lauchie murmured again, talking to himself mostly, with his eyes bent on the deck. “It was bound to happen the moment I fell.”

The elder started.

“You fell likewise ? ” he exclaimed, in an awestricken voice. “Dear, dear, that ye should have to tell me that ! But the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

“Nothing left but bits o’ glass—and all the fine stuff gone. There was nearly a whole mutchkin. I was saving it up for the trip home. Seven years’ old Glenlennan ! ”

The elder stared at him, partly in amazement, partly in anger.

“Mr. MacIntyre, are ye in your senses ? In the name of mercy what are ye talking about ? ”

“Seven years’ old Glenlennan,” Lauchie repeated, mournfully. “And when I fell the bottle went all to splinters.”

“Ay, the bottle,” replied the other, sharply. “I’m thinking ye’ve been paying too much attention to the bottle of late. And you that was a Rechabite——”

“And I am a Rechabite. From this moment I am a Rechabite,” continued Lauchlan, doggedly. “As sure as death, Mr. Robertson. I’m determined this time. From this moment, not a drop. You’ll see—you’ll see. And on the strength of it, now, we’ll just go down below and have a tasting——”

“Me?” said the elder. “Me, that has an example to set—unworthy as I am——”

“Then I draw back,” interposed Lauchie, with decision. And he went on, assuming a certain solemnity of air: “And who will be responsible for that? Who but yourself, Mr. Robertson? It is you that have refused to pluck a brand from the burning.”

The argument was irresistible. Together they went down to the cabin to celebrate and confirm the most recent of Lauchie’s many conversions; and as the story of Allan Henderson’s mishap and rescue had to be

told all over again, they were still sitting in the cabin when the *Fusilier* arrived at Duntroone.

One day at this time, Barbara Maclean was seated at the window of her room, sewing, with an occasional glance into the street below, when she saw Jack Ogilvie pass along the other side of the thoroughfare. It was a chance she had been looking forward to, perhaps watching for; immediately she rose, threw aside her work, and began with great rapidity to array herself in such out-of-door finery as she possessed, not forgetting to lay her cousin Jessie's stock under contribution. For hitherto she had been unsuccessful in obtaining even a few words of speech with the all too handsome Purser, who had bewildered her senses away on the evening of Mrs. McAskill's dance. Once or twice she had wandered round in the direction of the South Quay; and she had actually in the distance seen Ogilvie—smarter than ever in his uniform of navy blue and brass buttons—standing by the gangway of the *Aros Castle*, superintending the embarkation of passengers; but she had not had the courage to go nearer. Perhaps he had forgotten that he had ever

met her. He might not even know her name. He had to encounter so many people in the course of his duties.

But now that he had gone along this Campbell Street alone, and would probably return the same way, he might possibly recognise her as he passed. Accordingly, as soon as she had *fichu*, jacket, hat, gloves, and parasol complete, she stole downstairs, and went out on to the pavement. Of course, she could not remain here; for her aunt's shop was just opposite; and Mrs. Maclean might happen to look out, and espy her, and wonder what she was doing. But a short way along there was a watchmaker's window into which she had been in the habit of staring ever since she came to Duntroone; for in it was an ingenious little clock the time of which was kept or rather marked by a tiny gold ball that rolled down an inclined plane, the plane reversing itself at the end of every quarter of a minute; and this toy had fascinated her so that she would stand unweariedly following the zig-zag course of the small gold sphere. It was in front of this window that she now lingered, her eyes peeping corner-wise. And before long she became conscious that someone was approaching;

a furtive glance assured her that this was indeed none other than Ogilvie; and so, with apparent carelessness forsaking the toy-clock, she continued on her way, as if she were not expecting to meet anyone.

It was a quick, light, elate step that now sounded along the pavement: she made certain that in his youthful and joyous audacity and unconcern he would not recollect her or even look her way. As he approached, her heart beat wildly; her trembling fingers grasped the handle of her parasol as if for support. He drew nearer—she could not raise her eyes—he would go by without a word or a glance. And as a matter of fact he did pass her; then almost at the same moment he seemed to pause; she managed to turn her head the least little bit; and forthwith he came forward to her, in a manner doubtingly, yet with a propitiatory smile.

“Miss Maclean?” said he, and he raised his cap and held out his hand. “I beg your pardon—I was nearly being very rude—but you remained so short a time the night of Mrs. McAskill’s dance. And how is your cousin, Miss Jessie?” he went on—for he could see that she was overwhelmingly

embarrassed and self-conscious ; and he was a good-natured lad ; and the spectacle of beauty in distress aroused his sympathy. " I heard from her the other day—about the lecture in the Masonic Hall—Allan Henderson the schoolmaster is a great friend of hers and her mother's, and they are anxious he should have a good audience."

" And are you going to the lecture ? " said Barbara, finding her voice at last, and even succeeding in letting her eyes question him for a moment.

" Well, I am not so sure," he made answer. " It is not much in my line ; but if the boat is in in good time, I may go. And I will take one or two tickets whatever."

Now at this point he ought to have said good-bye, and gone away. But she was a remarkably pretty girl.

" I hope, Miss Maclean," said he, " that the next time you come to any such gathering, you will stay and join in the dancing. It was quite a disappointment to many of us that you and your cousin left so early. And I suppose you are as fond of dancing as most other young ladies."

" There was not much dancing in Kilree," said Barbara, blushing furiously.

And then at last he did say good-bye, and raised his cap, and departed; and Campbell Street—though it was high noon—seemed to her to grow dark.

No sooner was he gone than she hurried back to her room, and there she went straight to the mirror, to examine her appearance and her costume from every possible point of view. And then, taking off some of her things, she sate down and pondered—until it was time for her to see about getting ready the mid-day meal.

In the afternoon she was once more alone—that is to say, she was free to leave the house in charge of the girl Christina; and again she wandered out, this time making by a circuitous way for a certain back street. Arrived there, she stopped in front of an entry where a small brass plate informed the public that ‘Professor Sylvester, teacher of dancing and calisthenics’ abode within; she hesitated for a second or so; then, summoning up courage, she passed into the dark entry, rang a bell, and inquired if Professor Sylvester were at home. The next thing was that she found herself the sole occupant of a large and empty apartment, almost destitute of furniture save for a bench that

went along two of the walls, and a table on which were ranged a number of stone ginger-beer bottles and tumblers.

The door opened, and the professor appeared, violin in hand. He was an elderly, spare, careworn-looking man ; his demeanour was submissive and deprecatory ; he spoke with a slightly foreign accent when he addressed her. And his terms, when Barbara timidly asked for them, were of the most modest character.

“ But I must see where you will begin—I must see what lessons you will need before joining the class,” he said. “ And I will call in my daughter to be your partner.”

He rang the bell. A sandy-haired and rather sulky-looking girl appeared, who, recognising the situation at a glance, took down from a peg on the door a sailor’s jacket, and this she donned, no doubt intimating that she had now become a male partner, and was ready, in an impassive and perfunctory way, to go through her share of the performance. Barbara betrayed the greatest shame and confusion.

“ No,” said she, “ I cannot dance at all. I must begin at the beginning. And could I have lessons without any one looking on ? ”

“Certainly—certainly,” said the grave and worn-eyed professor. “And what time of the day would it please you to come?—for there are generally some young people here in the evening.”

There was no difficulty about making final arrangements; and when these were completed, Barbara, leaving the dancing-master’s house, returned home by a roundabout route, for she had resolved upon keeping this matter a dark secret from her aunt and her cousin. And so apt and assiduous did she prove to be that in less than ten days’ time the professor said to his daughter—

“Eugénie, I do not think in all my life I have known a pupil like that—so quick, so clever, so graceful in every movement. It all comes naturally to her—no effort—no constraint—it is a pleasure to teach her. If she had been trained from infancy she might have had a career.”

Eugénie the sulky did not respond. She had formed an unreasoning dislike towards the new pupil—perhaps through jealousy of her elegant figure and her all-conquering and pathetic eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCHEMES AND FORECASTS.

THAT was a great occasion when the young schoolmaster, though still something of a cripple, made his first reappearance in Mrs. Maclean's back parlour. The kind-hearted little widow, with covert tears in her lashes, did not know how to tend him and pet him enough; would have him sit in her own armchair; feared he was too near the fire, or too far away from the fire; and generally made such a fuss over him that he had shamefacedly to protest again and again, for he did not like being treated as a child before Jess.

"Well, indeed," said the widow, as she brought out currant-bun, shortbread, and other elements of festivity, "when something terrible bad has happened, they proclaim a

day of general mutilation throughout the country——”

“Humiliation you mean, mother,” Jess said, impatiently—she did not mind at other times, but when Allan was present these harmless little mistakes vexed her.

“Exactly that,” continued the widow, with much content. “And when something terrible fine happens, like Allan here getting about again, there should be a general rejoicing among us, if one could only manage it. But in the meantime, Jessie, you’ll just step across the way and bid Barbara smarten herself up, and come over, directly. Oh, well I know what pleases young folk! When a lad and a lass are thinking of each other, it’s little else they think of. Give them a look at each other, and that’s enough—so off ye go, Jess.”

Despite herself, a shade of mortification passed over Jess Maclean’s face when she was thus ordered to go and summon Barbara; for in her capacity of nurse she had established a sort of proprietary right in this fractious invalid; and now that he had come to report himself convalescent, she thought it hard that any half-stranger should be allowed to intervene. But she was a biddable lass;

she whipped on her shawl and bonnet, and went away to execute her mission; the only thing was that on her return she did not accompany Barbara into the parlour. She remained in the front shop. And at the same moment—whether out of mischief or out of sympathetic consideration—Mrs. Maclean made some excuse and joined her daughter; so that Barbara Maclean and the young schoolmaster found themselves alone together in the hushed little room.

“It is I that am pleased to see you going about again,” she said in Gaelic, and she gave him her hand for a moment, and then composedly took a seat.

“And surely,” said he in the same tongue, “my first visit was due to the house that has been so kind to me.”

He had paled slightly on her entrance; but now the joy of actually beholding her had recalled something of colour and animation to his face; his dark and glowing eyes drank their fill of her, and yet were never satisfied. How beautiful she was—so much more beautiful than the phantom image of her that had occupied his waking dreams; his covetous longing to secure this glorious creature all to himself seemed to run riot in

mad fancies; something appeared to whisper to him that, now when at last she was so near him, he must seize her hands, and hold them tight, and say to her ‘You are mine—you are mine—you cannot go away from me—not any more, for ever.’ Meanwhile Barbara was twiddling with the lace frills of her cuffs.

“And you,” he continued—getting some mastery over himself, and dismissing these delirious imaginings, “You I am sure have found the house a kind house, with a warm hearth for you.”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” replied Barbara, rather indifferently.

“The night of the wreck of the *Sanda*,” he went on—his glowing eyes still dwelling on her—his nostrils sensitive to the scent of her costume—“I thought you were lonely and sad enough; but I told you you were going to a friendly home, and I knew that a friendly home you would find it. And who but I was the first one to meet you?—so that ever since I have thought of you, and been anxious to know that you were well looked after; and not like one strayed into a strange fold. Many is the time I would like to have sent along to ask you to come

and see me, that you might talk about yourself; but I was not so bold, to disturb you. But I often heard of you; and I was sure that from your aunt and your cousin you would have the kindest of treatment——”

“Indeed I have nothing to complain of,” Barbara said—with a glance towards the glass door: perhaps she was surprised that she was being left alone in this fashion.

“When a man lies sick in bed he has time to think of many things,” the schoolmaster proceeded—not quite knowing how to make use of these invaluable moments—having so much to say, and yet in a bewilderment of hesitation as to how far he dared go—“and above all things I was anxious you should understand and be sure that you were among people who wished you well. And perhaps, here or there, might be one whose interest in you was warmer than that—if the time was come to speak——”

Perhaps she comprehended his meaning; perhaps not; at all events she somewhat abruptly rose, and said—

“I am wondering what my aunt is about, and Jessie: it is not usual for them to neglect you in this way.”

And with that she went to the windowed

door, and opened it, and looked into the front shop. But at this moment the arrival of a new visitor—a stormy visitor—absorbed attention : it was the town-councillor, who had come hastily along on hearing of Allan's having adventured forth ; and now he was all excitement and importance in his desire to dominate such a situation ; he drove the Macleans before him into the parlour—the door being left a bit open as was customary.

“Man, Allan,” he cried. “I’m just delighted to see ye here again, among your own kith and kin, and in a cosy circle too. And I’ve news for ye, lad, I’ve news for ye ; if ye’ll not think I have been taking too great a liberty ; but I hardly expected to see ye about so soon, and so I have been making inquiries on your behalf. Yes, indeed,” continued Mr. McFadyen, with great vivacity—regarding himself as the hero of the hour, no doubt, and conscious that Jess Maclean’s eyes were upon him—“the moment Miss Jessie put that idea of the Latin class into my head says I to myself, ‘Well, if Allan is laid by the heels, and cannot look after this matter, it’s just me that’s going to do it for him.’ And I’ve found a splendid room for ye—the very ticket : the top floor

at Ross and Maclagan's, the lawyers; and I'm sure they'll be reasonable about it, for it's empty, and not a bit of use to them. And just as I was thinking it would cost ye a stiff penny to put benches and desks into it, then I chanced to hear of the Masonic Hall folk wanting to sell off a lot of their old chairs, and says I to myself, 'If we can get them cheap, they'll just do fine.' Then I went to the office of the *Times and Telegraph*, and saw the manager, and he says if ye'll give him the advertisement by the year, he'll take it on the easiest terms; in fact, he was hinting it might not cost ye anything if you would do some writing for the paper at odd hours——"

"No, no," said Allan, frowning, "I will not have it that way."

But Peter McFadyen was not the man to be daunted.

"Just as ye like—just as ye like," he said, blithely. "And that's not all the news. For I've been asking a question here and there, I hope in a discreet kind of way, and I find there's several of my own friends would like their boys to get an hour or two's Latin after the office-work or the shop-work was over; and that's how it stands, Allan, my

lad, that as soon as you care to start, I'll guarantee ye'll have quite a respectable size of a class within a fortnight; and there's no reason why such a class should not go on growing bigger and bigger, for I find it is greatly wanted in Duntroone."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Mr. McFadyen," the young schoolmaster said, "and especially to Miss Jessie, for it was she that first thought of it. It's a good thing to have friends."

He ventured to glance towards Barbara. Was she betraying any interest in these poor schemes of his? Nay, could he dare to hope that she was personally concerned in them? But Barbara was staring into the fire, with abstracted gaze.

The councillor, who evidently regarded himself as the founder of Allan's fortunes, now proceeded to prophesy great things; and he was in a humorous mood as well; those were gay pictures he drew of the future. Even the little widow was constrained to remark—

"Well, Mr. McFadyen, it's you that are in high spirits the night. But take care. Do you remember the old saying '*You are too merry, you'll have to marry.*'"

The warning only increased the councillor's jocosity.

"Faith, that's a good one!" he cried, with a prodigious laugh. "Me marrying? Is that your advice, Mrs. Maclean? That's a fine idea, to be sure—the idea of me marrying!"

"I do not see what there is to laugh at!" the widow protested.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what stands in the way," he said, with sudden gravity—but it was only part of his profound facetiousness. "There's one very good reason, and one's enough; and the reason is that I'm too bashful. Ay, there it is—that's the truth."

With beaming face and demurely twinkling eyes he glanced from one to the other: to himself the notion of his being bashful—a man of the world like himself being bashful—was irresistibly comic.

"I do not know about that," said the downright little widow; "but when I was young, if a man had made up his mind about the girl he wanted to marry, I'm thinking there was not much difficulty about his finding words to ask her. Maybe it is different nowadays. Nowadays it seems to be money first, and your sweetheart second.

Here have you yourself, Mr. McFadyen, been planning out all that Allan is to be, and the grand things he is to do; and yet never a word about his taking a wife—though perhaps there would be no great need for him to go far afield.”

These words were spoken with smiling significance—the widow being clearly proud of her diplomacy; but nothing short of consternation ensued. Jessie looked particularly distressed; Barbara betrayed less confusion—indeed she appeared to treat this open innuendo as of little import. As for the young man who had thus been almost invited to choose one of the cousins, he maintained a stern silence. It was the councillor who came to the general relief.

“If there’s one thing in the world I would like,” he said, “it’s just this—that the five of us that are here at this moment could get away for a trip to London to see the sights. Wouldn’t that be worth while?—just by ourselves—a little party—and I’ve been to London myself—— I know my ways about—I could show ye all the fine things that belong to the nation, and therefore they belong just as much to you or to me as to anybody else.”

“Indeed there’s truth in what ye say, Mr. McFadyen,” the schoolmaster put in. “And maybe John Smith—the common man, the poor man—would be a little better contented with his lot if he only remembered what great possessions are his, and what has been done to please him. If John Smith were a philosopher, he would begin and ask questions. For whose delight, for whose use, are splendid public buildings built, and bridges thrown across rivers, and handsome embankments made? These belong to him—the poor man—to John Smith. What Prince or Duke has a collection of pictures like the National Gallery?—that is John Smith’s. The gems and antiquities and books of the British Museum, the art treasures at South Kensington—what private collection has anything to compare with them?—and they all belong to John Smith, who has no trouble about them, no fear of being swindled, the best experts of the world buying for him everywhere. The Queen has a fine garden behind Buckingham Palace; but it’s not a third as big as Hyde Park—which is John Smith’s domain. For I’ve been to London too, Mr. McFadyen,” continued the schoolmaster, who could talk freely and spiritedly enough when

his sombre fits of silence were abandoned, “and I’ve seen the Green Park, Regent’s Park, Battersea Park, and the rest of them, and their ornamental waters, and their great staff of gardeners—all kept up for the public use. What Duke or Marquis has a hall to compare with Westminster Hall—where plain John Smith can walk up and down at any time of the day and eat an orange in contentment? Royal Processions to St. Paul’s—Lord Mayor’s Shows—pageants of that kind are designed for the poor man, not the rich. And if we here, Mr. Councillor, should ever go to London together, and when you’ll be taking us to the British Museum or to South Kensington, you’ll just have to drop a word now and again reminding us that these are our own collections, and better than any other in the land, and kept up for us with the greatest care. I wonder now,” he said, turning to Mrs. Maclean, “I wonder, when Mr. McFadyen goes with us to the National Gallery, if he’ll remember his position. Will he take us up to the famous Raphael, and say to us : ‘ This is my last great acquisition : I had to pay a little trifle of £70,000 before I could get it away from Blenheim Palace.’ ”

The practical little widow was puzzled by

these vagaries: her answer was more to the point.

“So you would be off to London, the lot of you?” she said, cheerfully enough. “Well, well, that’s natural for young folk; but such gaddings about are no for an old body like me. I’m tied to the premises; I’m a fixture here as much as a shelf or a gasalier——”

“Not at all—we’ll not stir without ye,” Peter insisted, gallantly. “Not one step will we stir. You’ll just have to get somebody ye can trust to take your place in the shop; then off we go—like school-children for a holiday. It’s but right—it’s but right, Mrs. Maclean. Year after year we keep on working and working: are we never to give ourselves a bit treat? I’ll undertake to say there’s not one in this room has seen the Queen. But we’ve a right to see her; for she’s a part of the Constitution that we pay for. Dod, man, Allan, ye put bold ideas into folks’ heads; for if everything belongs to John Smith, and if I am John Smith—as ye plainly intimate—then I am the richest man in Europe; and surely the richest man in Europe should be able to afford a trip to London. What d’ye say, Mrs. Maclean?”

And you're coming with us, mind. Not a foot will we stir without ye. My word, we'll make things lively in the big town!"

But it was not until Mr. McFadyen and Allan had left the hospitable little parlour, and started off for home, that the councillor revealed the secret reason for his thus insisting on a quite chimerical project.

"Did ye see how I managed it?" he said, with great exultation. "Did ye see how natural-like I led them on to look on us all as forming a family-party—that's you and Barbara, and me and Jessie, with the old lady as general friend and adviser. For it doesna do to frighten them at first. It's like taming a wild animal—ye must be cautious and slow and cunning. Dod, man," exclaimed the councillor, honestly, "I think I showed a little skill! Did I not, now?—did I not?"

Allan was silent: his thoughts were elsewhere. But Mr. McFadyen was not to be discouraged.

"What care I," he continued, gleefully, "whether such a trip as that to London is impracticable or no? Jessie and Barbara have been led into thinking of the four of us being there together, with perhaps the old

lady left behind in Duntroone. And of course that would mean two weddings—two weddings, you rascal!—and when the two weddings come about, you'll just tell me if I did not show a little tact and address in paving the way and making everything easy."

"I do not like the sound of the wind," said Allan, absently staring out towards the moaning and inscrutable sea. "It is going to be a wild night."

"Ye're a clever chiel, Allan," continued the complacent councillor, as the two men paused for a second at the parting of their ways, "and your head is just filled with learning and knowledge. But it takes experience of the world, it takes experience of human nature, to manage a difficult affair like this; and maybe you'll be the first to acknowledge as much—maybe you'll be ready to confess that much—when you and Barbara and Jessie and myself find ourselves in a carriage together, driving about and seeing the sights of London."

The schoolmaster did not reply. With a brief "Good-night!" he turned away—and disappeared into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PTARMIGAN BROOCH.

It was indeed a wild night—the wind howling in the chimneys and shaking the windows, the rain falling in torrents, the long swish of the waves heard all along the shore; but towards morning there came a sudden and unaccountable calm; and day-break revealed a brooding stillness over land and sea—revealed a slate-hued world, vague, and dull, and sombre, with the mountains of Mull and Morven hidden behind a dark, formless, impenetrable wall of vapour. Nevertheless, sullen as the outlook might be, there was steady progress towards the light. Up in the high portals of the east, a curious kind of glare began to elbow its way through the heavy masses of cloud; the slopes of Kerrara answered in warm tones

of saffron and orange and golden-green ; as the hours went by, the heavens became more and more broken up ; by noon there were shafts of sunlight here and there, and a vivid and welcome blue in the far stretches of water outside the bay ; while the Mull and Morven hills were gradually returning into the visible universe, after their sojourn in unknown space.

And perhaps it was merely this unexpected clearing-up of the morning that drew Barbara Maclean away from her household duties ; but at all events, before going out, she dressed herself with unusual care, for the better display of such small articles of finery as she possessed. When eventually she left the house, she took her way along the sea front, apparently with no very set purpose. She passed the railway-station. She reached the South Quay, at which the *Aros Castle* was lying ; but, as a single swift and covert glance assured her, no officer was visible on board ; it was not yet time for the steamer to sail, and at present the only work going forward was the trundling-in of barrow-loads of coal from the adjoining trucks. She continued her seemingly aimless stroll. She arrived at the foot of the Gallows Hill ; and

here she lingered about for some little time, looking at the nets and boats and white-washed cottages that are a survival from the time when Duntroone was little more than a fishing village. The sunlight was becoming more and more general. There was a spring-like mildness and sweetness in the air. The waters of the bay were now a shining azure as well as the further plain; and the long spur of Kerrara shooting out into them, was of burning gold.

And when she turned to make her way back again, she was regarding an equally cheerful scene—the wooded hills, the houses dotted on the slopes, the ivied castle at the point, the ethereal mountains of Morven beyond the blue; and it was but natural that when she came to the coal-trucks, she should go outside, otherwise her view would have been debarred. But passing outside the coal-trucks brought her close to the *Aros Castle*—indeed, she had to go by within touching distance of the gangway; and it was at this moment that she chanced to raise her eyes—and behold! here was the Purser, talking to a friend. He immediately turned from his companion, and addressed her as she approached.

“Are you going a trip with us to-day, Miss Maclean?”

“Oh, no,” she answered, in pretty confusion; “I—I only went to have a look at the old part of the town.”

“Then if you will come on board,” said he, politely, “we will take you across to the North Quay, and it will save you the walk round. We are off in a few minutes now.”

“Oh, thank you indeed,” said she, with modest and smiling eyes; and forthwith she passed along the gangway, he following; and she stepped on to the upper deck—which was very different from any part of the old *Sanda*, for here everything was trim and smart, the paint and varnish fresh and clean, the brass-work as brilliant as polish could make it. And Ogilvie fetched a deck-chair for her, though she did not care to be seated; the run across to the North Quay would not be of long duration.

He chatted pleasantly to her for a little while, about the ordinary topics of Dun-troone; and Barbara did her best to answer with animation and accord, though at times she was a little hampered for want of the proper English phrase. One thing she did

manage: she cured him of the habit of calling her "Miss Maclean."

"My name is Barbara," she said, almost with reproach.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Miss Barbara—I ought to have remembered——"

"But how could you remember?" said she, coyly; "I am sure now you do not recollect where it was that we first met."

"Indeed, I do, then," he answered at once. "And the next time we meet on such an occasion, I will look to you to give me a dance."

"I hope so," murmured Barbara, with some touch of colour, and lowered eyes.

The train crept into the station; and presently a few passengers made their appearance, coming towards the *Aros Castle*. Among the first of these to reach the gangway were a lady and her two daughters, the latter tall, fair-haired, English-looking girls, with good features and distinguished bearing. As the little stout mamma stepped on deck, she bestowed a brief nod of recognition upon the Purser, who respectfully raised his cap; then she and her charges went below to the saloon, to deposit there their wraps and rugs and books.

“That is Mrs. Stewart of Innistroyan,” said Jack Ogilvie to Barbara, in a confidential whisper.

Almost immediately thereafter the three ladies reappeared; and the mother, coming over to where the Purser was standing, said—perhaps a trifle brusquely—

“Can I speak with you for a moment, Mr. Ogilvie?”

Barbara was thus left alone; but she could all the more carefully study the dress and bearing of these three new-comers, whom Ogilvie seemed to regard with considerable deference. Ordinarily he was rather off-hand in his manner; but now, in speaking to this Mrs. Stewart—probably about some business-matter—he was quite subdued and attentive. And as for the two girls, about whom Barbara was chiefly curious: she could not but be conscious of their air of distinction, however simply and plainly they might be dressed. Something, she knew not what, told her they were of “the gentry.” With intense but concealed scrutiny she watched their demeanour as they listened to the Purser; she observed the half-indifferent look, the occasional glance towards the surrounding neighbourhood. As for their

costume, it seemed to be the perfection of unostentatious neatness and fitness; the only ornament that each wore—so far as she could see—was an insignificant little brooch consisting of a ptarmigan's foot set in silver, that fastened the collar of the blue serge jacket.

But by this time the hawsers had been thrown off, and the *Aros Castle* was moving across to the other quay. Ogilvie came back to Barbara.

“This is a very short sail you have taken with us,” he said to her, in his easy and familiar way, as they were approaching the pier. “Some other time you and Miss Jessie must go for a run with us to Tobermory, and there we will pick you up on our way back. I know that Mrs. Maclean has friends at Tobermory.”

The steamer was now slowing; and it turned out that Barbara was the only passenger that meant to land. When the gangway had been shoved out, she timidly took her purse from her pocket—it was probably but poorly furnished.

“Will you tell me——” she said, bashfully, when he interrupted her: he had noticed that little movement.

"No, no ; no, no," said he, smiling, and he put up his hand in a deprecatory fashion. "You must not think of such a thing. We shall only be too glad to take you across the bay, any time you happen to be on the other side. And tell Miss Jessie she must bring you for a longer sail."

She said good-bye, and stepped ashore ; she watched the passengers embark, and the *Aros Castle* steam away again ; soon she lost sight of Ogilvie, who had apparently gone below ; and the last figures she could make out were those of the two tall young ladies, who had seemed to possess so strange and mysterious a quality of attraction and perfection, even to the fancy of a girl.

When she went up into the town, she met her cousin Jess, who had been along to buy some wool ; and as they proceeded home together, they encountered Lauchlan MacIntyre. The shoemaker was of morose aspect.

"You'll be coming to the lecture to-morrow night, Mr. MacIntyre ?" said Jess, pleasantly.

"I'm not so sure," responded Long Lauchie, in melancholy tones. "It seems a fearfu' waste of opportunity. To think of a

lecture on such things as songs, when there's but the one subject that is of tremendous concern to us, and that's the crying evil that is ruining us as a nation. Ay, just ruining us—ruining us—the curse of drink that is destroying the kintry from end to end. And what can we do, but wrestle with it, in Parliament and out of Parliament, in season and out of season, ay, and mek every election turn on it, and every candidate pledged for total abolition, ay, and have a section of the Rechabites in every fullage everywhere, until we put down and stamp out this terrible, terrible drink. There must be no peace until the whisky traffic is wholly rooted out; and until a brand is put on a man that would be seen to enter a public-house—ay, a just persecution—a lawful persecution—there must be no moderation—no mercy——”

“But you'll drive common-sense folk into rebellion,” Jess said, good-humouredly. “Would you have them take to drink in self-defence?”

“Aw, to hear you talk like that, and you at your years!” said the shoemaker, almost in despair. “As sure's death it's just fearful to hear one of your years talk like that. And to think that you are on the side of

the drunkards, and the licensed victuallers, and Sodom and Gomorrah. But there's time for ye yet. If you'll tek a warning, ye may turn yet. You'll come over to us—ay—you'll come over to us and be saved—as sure as death, you'll be saved.”

“Well, indeed, Mr. MacIntyre,” said Jess—and her pretty grey eyes, that at times were rather inclined to sarcasm, were now perfectly demure, “I'm not afflicted with any great craving except now and again for a cup of tea; but when the hour of trial comes—when I have to fight the demon—it will be a great thing for me to have an example to look to. And you'll give me a word of encouragement——”

“I will, I will,” said the shoemaker, solemnly and sadly; and with that he continued on his way; while Jess turned to her cousin Barbara, who had for some time been staring into the window of the jeweller's shop.

It was a favourite resort of hers. For here she could feast her eyes on treasures that were far beyond her means—silver fastening-pins set with lemon-yellow, and white, and clear lilac cairngorms—scent-bottles inlaid with the various clan tartans—

brooches, bracelets, necklets studded with Iona stones—ear-rings, finger-rings, sleeve-links, locket—tray after tray of fascinating nick-nacks of the very names of many of which she was entirely ignorant. And at this moment, when Jess said—

“Will you wait a moment, Barbara, or will you come into the shop? I want Mr. Boyd to see what is the matter with my watch——”

—Barbara accepted the invitation with a secret joy; though it was in a timorous kind of fashion that she followed her cousin into this magician’s palace of wonders and splendours. She looked all round the jeweller’s shop with an awe-stricken air; and then her eyes came back to the glass cases on the counter, where there was an endless variety of surprisingly beautiful objects. Not only that, but a tray of brooches, that a customer had been inspecting just before they came in, remained open on the top of one of the cases; so that if she chose she could take up any one of those marvels for closer examination. And so while Mr. Boyd—who was an old friend of the Macleans, and a solicitous, kindly, amiable sort of man—was inquiring into

the state and condition of Jessie's watch, Barbara was passing in review these priceless things, comparing and admiring and coveting. But in especial she was attracted by the brooch that occupied the place of honour in the middle of the tray. It was formed of a ptarmigan's foot, set in gold, with a deep yellow cairngorm above and another stone of the same kind and colour fixed in the middle claw. Now the ptarmigan brooches worn by the two young ladies who were on board the *Aros Castle*—and whom Jack Ogilvie seemed to treat with so much respect—were very plain and simple ornaments; here was something of a similar character, but more rich and resplendent, and better calculated for purposes of display. Alas! she knew too well that it was far away out of the reach of her small savings; such means and methods of drawing attention, of compelling admiration, were for people whose purses were abundantly filled.

Ultimately it was decided that the recusant watch should be left behind; and then, business over, Mr. Boyd proceeded to a little neighbourly gossip, in the course of which Barbara was introduced to him, her beautiful eyes winning favour as usual. The friendly

jeweller sent his best regards to the widow ; and finally Jessie and Barbara left the shop.

But they had gone only a few yards when Mr. Boyd came after them—he had not stayed to put on any kind of head-covering.

“Miss Maclean,” said he, and simultaneously both girls turned. “I beg your pardon, but did you happen to notice a gold ptarmigan-brooch—it was in a tray on the counter——”

At the same moment there was a slight click as of something dropping on the pavement. He glanced downwards.

“Oh, here it is,” he said ; and he stooped and picked it up.

For a second there was silence. The watchmaker looked grave and troubled ; Jess appeared to be astonished and perplexed rather than frightened ; Barbara, timid as a fawn as she ordinarily was, alone remained perfectly impassive in countenance.

“It must have caught on to some part of your dress,” said Mr. Boyd, slowly, and with some constraint. “Well, I’m sorry to have caused you any trouble.” And thereupon and with no further word he returned to his shop.

But on the evening of this same day,

sitting by his fireside, John Boyd seemed thoughtful and depressed; and his wife would insist on knowing the reason. And at last, under severe injunctions of secrecy, he revealed to her the story.

“I cannot tell what to think,” he continued, as if communing with himself. “I made the excuse, then and there, for the sake of my old friend Mrs. Maclean. And maybe it was true: maybe their dress did catch up the brooch. Such things have happened. For how can I believe that Jessie Maclean, or this cousin of hers, that seems a nice, modest, quiet sort of a girl, would knowingly lift a piece of jewellery from the counter and carry it away? I cannot believe it. And then, ye see, goodwife, I did not actually find it in the possession of either of them. If I had, it would have been my duty to have called in the police——”

“John!” exclaimed his wife. “Have ye taken leave of your wits? Ay, and if it was the half of your shop in question, would ye bring scandal and disgrace on the remaining years of an old friend? No, no!—not for half the shop, or whole of the shop! I’m better acquainted with ye than ye are yourself, man! And no doubt it was the tassels

and bugles that the young girls are so fond of nowadays that caught on to the brooch—no doubt at all that was it!”

“Maybe so, Jean, maybe so,” said the watchmaker, who seemed to have been quite unhinged and upset by this incident. “But mind, not one word to any living creature. That is my charge to ye. Not one single word about it to any living creature.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LECTURE AND THEREAFTER.

It wanted but an hour to the lecture, yet Jess Maclean did not stir ; she sate silent and absorbed—an unusual mood with her, for she was naturally of a merry temperament ; her head was bent over her needlework, and she did not look up when she was spoken to.

“ Jess,” said her mother, “ what has ailed you all the day long ? Anyone would think this should be a great occasion for you—you that has always been so proud of Allan Henderson, and telling us what we might expect of him. And now he is appearing before the public—and a great many people coming to see him—and who should be more pleased than yourself—ay, and more to the front at such a time, for Allan is never

tired of saying that you are the best friend and adviser he has got——”

“I am not going to the lecture, mother,” said Jess.

“Well, well, now, and what is the meaning of it all?” the widow demanded. She regarded her daughter a little more narrowly, and was alarmed to see that there were tears in her eyes. “What is the matter, Jess?” she exclaimed.

“What is the matter, mother?—what is the matter?” the girl cried, suddenly bursting into a passionate fit of weeping and sobbing. “How can I go to the lecture—how can I face those people—when I am a suspected thief?”

And there and then, in incoherent fashion, she told the story of the incident of the previous day, over which she had been brooding for four-and-twenty hours and more. Meanwhile the little widow’s indignation was like to have altogether overcome her powers of utterance.

“And that’s John Boyd—that’s John Boyd!” she managed to say at last—though she was about breathless with anger and scorn. “And who but your own father was it that helped him when he had to make a composition with

his creditors over twenty years ago, ay, helped to make him the well-to-do man he is this day; and the best of friends we were supposed to be; and now it's this John Boyd—it's this John Boyd that comes forward and accuses one of my girls of being a thief!" She rose from her chair and threw aside her work. "Well," said she, with resolute lips, "this very minute I am going along to have a word with John Boyd. I will see what he means by calling either of my girls a thief——"

"Mother," interposed Jess, piteously, "he did not say that—he did not say anything of the kind. When he spoke it was to make an excuse. It was Mr. Boyd himself that suggested it was likely the brooch had caught on to the dress of one or other of us. That's what he said. But all the same I could see what he was thinking. I saw his look—though I did not quite understand it till afterwards. And ever since I have been going over what happened; and now—now I know what he was thinking when he picked up the brooch from the pavement. I know it—I know it—I could see it—and—and I never thought to be taken for a thief." And here there was a fresh burst of crying.

"It isn't for a thief," she said, between her sobs, "to go to hear Allan's lecture—and face all those people——"

"Jess," said Mrs. Maclean, firmly, "you'll do as I bid ye. You'll go across to the house, and get yourself dressed and ready, and you'll put out my best things, and you'll send Kirsty over to help me to shut up the shop. I was not going to the lecture; but now I am going; and I do not care who the people are, but I will show them, when Barbara and you go in, that you can hold up your heads with any. And as for John Boyd——"

"Mother, you must not quarrel with Mr. Boyd," pleaded Jess. "It was only natural he should be startled. And he is an old friend——"

"Ay, and you do not know the saying, then?" retorted the little widow, sharply, "'*Friendship is as it's kept.*' The man that suspects either you or Barbara of being a thief is no friend of mine. But away with ye, now, and get ready—if Barbara will let you have five minutes of the looking-glass, for she's a fearfu' creature for making much of herself and decking herself up. And when Mr. McFadyen comes, you will tell

him he must get me a ticket, and I will pay him for it afterwards."

Peter McFadyen was an important and a consequential man this night. The provost, who had consented to preside at the meeting, had been summoned away to Edinburgh on business connected with the town; and the senior councillor, nothing loth, had been prevailed on to take his place. And fully sensible of his responsibility was Peter. When the members of the Literary and Scientific Association, and their friends, with many of the towns-folk, and a few representatives of the neighbouring gentry, were at length assembled in the Masonic Hall, the chairman was in nowise facetious and droll—as if he were in Mrs. Maclean's back-parlour; he was dignified, and measured of speech. And when, in formally introducing the lecturer to the audience, he had pronounced a pompous little eulogium, which caused Allan to look particularly uncomfortable, Mr. McFadyen thereafter glanced down towards the Macleans, who were seated in the front row, it was plain he would have said—
'Do you perceive that now? A man may be sprightly and jocular enough in the freedom of private society, and yet know

how to perform his public duties with proper state and decorum.' Alas ! Jessie Maclean never looked his way—paid no heed to him. She was intently regarding Allan—she was tremblingly anxious that he should betray no nervousness—in her heart she was beseeching this audience to be kind and attentive and sympathetic. Barbara, who had adorned herself with her most effective finery, kept cevertly watching the door : the handsome Purser had not yet put in an appearance—perhaps the *Aros Castle* was late, perhaps he had forgotten the half-implied promise.

Jess need not have been concerned. When the young schoolmaster rose and placed the sheets of his MS. on the stand before him, there was not a trace of nervousness about him ; he acknowledged, and barely acknowledged, the friendly reception accorded him ; and at once, and in a business-like way, proceeded with his lecture—the main thesis of which was to the effect that, if the German people were to vanish from the face of the earth, leaving only this invaluable collection of Volkslieder, the philosopher of future centuries could reconstruct the nation, with all its desires, aims, habits, and occupations, from these various and artless utterances.

But it was when he proceeded to give specimens of the folk-songs—using for the most part his own translations—songs of fiery patriotism, songs of plaintive home-yearning, love-songs and sad farewells, songs of simple family life, songs of banter and merriment, more rarely of sarcasm, joyous drinking songs, songs and choruses of the hunter's craft, legends and old-world tales—then it was that he captured the interest of his audience, and was rewarded by frequent if timid outbursts of applause. It was the non-literary ballad that he chose by preference—the voice of the common people; but he could not well exclude Heine's 'Pilgrimage to Kevlaar,' or Uhland's 'Landlady's Daughter,' for they also were of the people. And when he repeated a lover's passionate appeal to his sweetheart, or told some pathetic story of half-forgotten times, was he not really addressing, out of all this audience, only one? There was some comparison of these German folk-songs with the Gaelic songs of the West Highlands, and mention made of one or two well-known favourites: all this was meant for Barbara—since she had been so graciously kind as to come to the lecture.

And yet it may be doubted whether Barbara heard anything more than an occasional word or phrase, conveying next to nothing. She had abandoned any hope she may have entertained of seeing Jack Ogilvie appear at the door of the hall; and now her attention was turned to the hall itself, the like of which she had never beheld before. For over the deep red walls hung a wonderful ceiling of clear grey-blue; and at the further end of the ceiling a golden sun sent out flashing rays, while at the other extreme shone a silver moon surrounded by seven stars. Then all round the room were mysterious devices; and there were painted pillars; and an arch; and in the keystone of the arch an eye that glared at her as if out of some vague immensity. Compass, square, and trowel she might or might not understand—they were commonplace emblems; but this immovable eye seemed to have some incomprehensible and compelling power of scrutiny; it fascinated her; she could not get away from that relentless gaze. And so, if she did listen at all, it was in a mechanical fashion. ‘Prinz Eugen der edle Ritter,’ ‘Doctor Eisenbart,’ ‘Der Jäger aus Kurpfalz,’ had apparently but little interest for her.

Nevertheless, something did at last happen to arouse her from her apathetic dreaming. The lecturer had been giving examples of the better-known of the German bacchanalian songs—‘Crambambuli,’ ‘Im kühlen Keller,’ and the like—when, to everybody’s amazement, a tall and gaunt form was seen to rise in the very midst of the assemblage. It was Long Lauchie, the shoemaker. For a moment he seemed frightened at his own temerity, and looked round in a helpless way; but there was an inward monitor to support him; the next second he had found his speech.

“I am not wishing to interrupt,” he said, in Gaelic, “but every man has his duty, and I will not stand by and be listening in silence——”

“Order, order,” called the chairman, with a portentous frown.

But the shoemaker, pale as he was on finding himself in this novel position, with all eyes turned towards him, was not to be deterred.

“It is I that must make my protest, if there is to be such praise for drinking, and not a word of warning to the young——”

“Order, order,” the chairman called out

again; and then he added, with still greater severity: "MacIntyre, sit down, and behave yourself!"

Meanwhile the lecturer had stopped, and was calmly waiting to hear what Long Lauchie had to say. It was Mrs. Maclean who was most violently indignant over the interruption.

"That tipsymaniac!" she exclaimed, in an undertone. "Will nobody put him out? To bring disgrace on a meeting like this, and Allan going on just splendid!"

"Such praise of the sin of drinking," continued the shoemaker, doggedly, "I will set my face against, no matter how many there may be to cry me down. I have no word to say against the young man, Allan Henderson; it is not I that have a word to say against him; but when I hear such fearful things repeated, I am bound to lift up my voice. Yes, indeed. Is there anyone here that knows what drink is doing in this land—what terrible, terrible things are happening all through the whisky——?"

"Lauchlan MacIntyre," called out the chairman—who was beside himself with rage and shame on finding his authority thus scouted, "if you do not instantly resume

your seat, I will ask one or two of the young men near you to remove you from this assembly. Do you hear me, now? Will you sit down?"

"Drink," the shoemaker went on, "is the ruin and curse of this country—it is bringing a judgment upon us——"

"Then I do call on the young men," broke in Peter, with concealed fury. "Remove him! You there near him, remove that person! Put him out. I, as chairman of this meeting, authorise you to put him out."

Well, there were two or three of the younger lads only too glad to have a little bit of fun; and the luckless shoemaker—offering no physical resistance, it is true, but still insisting on his conscientious protest against anything that savoured of the praise of drink—was haled away and conducted to the door, and ejected into the night. Thereafter peace and harmony were restored: and the lecture was continued and ended in the most satisfactory manner, a unanimous vote of thanks to the schoolmaster bringing the proceedings to a close.

And very lively and content was the little supper-party that later on assembled at Mrs. Maclean's—a supper-party limited to five, at

the cunning suggestion of the councillor. For, said he, they could be much merrier, with less of restraint, when they were 'by themselves'; and 'by themselves' had come to mean himself and Jess, and Allan and Barbara, with the widow as hostess and guardian. This, therefore, was the circle now gathered round the hospitable board; and a very happy little circle it seemed to be. Jess, in especial, was in great spirits; she was delighted with the way everything had gone off, and at the reception accorded to her hero; though, as usual, she could not help jibing and mocking at him.

"There's some that pretend to be very masterful, and cool, and undisturbed," said she, darkly. "But when I see a young man that is impatient of every word of introduction—though all kinds of fine things are being said about him—and that is anxious to plunge at once into the business before him, I can tell that he is just as timorous as a mouse, for all his affectation of composure."

"If you mean me, Jessie," said the schoolmaster, laughing, "I will confess this to you, that I think I must have been nervous. I did not know it at the time; but I guess that

it must have been so, from the sensation of relief I have now that it's all over."

"I hope," observed Mr. McFadyen, who still preserved a certain air of state, "I hope I was not too severe in rebuking that fool of a man, MacIntyre——"

"Severe!" cried the little widow, with returning indignation. "He should have been locked up by the police! To interrupt a meeting in that way! I declare it made me feel quite historical—I was like to choke——"

"And I trust there was no undue violence," continued the councillor, still with something of a grand air, "on the part of the young men who removed him. It was a painful duty that devolved upon me; but I had to execute it; and I trust there was no undue violence——"

"Oh, you need not trouble about that, Mr. McFadyen," Jess said, blithely. "The young lads who carried out your orders—and the shoemaker—did it as peaceably as was possible."

"Ah, well, ah, well," said Peter, with a sigh of satisfaction, "it was but a trifling incident, after all; and one may fairly say that the whole evening was a distinct success.

And though in a measure I was responsible for the conduct of the proceedings, still, I do not think I am taking credit to myself when I maintain that everything went off just beautiful. And, mind you, Allan, lad, it's a great thing for you to keep yourself before the public—you that's starting the Latin class, and having a fine career before ye, as we all of us hope. It's a great thing to be known and respected by your fellow-townsmen; and I was well pleased to see, when ye stood up, that ye had a friendly welcome from them——”

“And what did you think of the Masonic Hall, Miss Barbara?” said the young schoolmaster, turning abruptly to his neighbour—for he did not like this talk about himself.

“I was never seeing any place like that before,” the girl said. “And I could not understand the meaning of the things on the walls. There was one, in front of me, that was very strange—it looked like a large eye, single and staring——”

“Oh, that is the All-seeing Eye—I suppose, for I am not a mason,” he said.

She regarded him for a moment doubtfully.

“All-seeing?” she repeated; and then she

said, with some petulance: "But how can it be All-seeing, when it is only painted on the wall?"

"It is merely an emblem," he replied, with great gentleness. "It does not pretend to be anything but a symbol——"

"Is it put there to frighten people?" she demanded, resentfully.

"Why, surely not!"

"Then what is the use of it?—though anyone knows that an eye painted on a wall cannot be seeing anything!" she said. And this was her last word on the subject; and sufficiently enigmatic it was; for he knew nothing of what secret imaginings had been passing through her mind, as she sate and half-listened to the discourse about German folk-songs.

Altogether, a cheerful and pleasant hour or so, after the serious labours of the evening were over; but it was growing late; and at length Mr. McFadyen and Allan rose to go. Nevertheless, the councillor was still loquacious; for there was to be a great match at golf between the station-master and himself, on the following Monday afternoon; and he was anxious that Jessie, and Barbara, and Mrs. Maclean, too, if that were

possible, should witness the contest; and he was discussing this project as he went to the door, both Jess and her mother accompanying him. This was Allan's opportunity—Barbara having remained behind: it was an opportunity thrust upon him, as it were chance-wise—an opportunity he could not, and did not care to, avoid. For he was in a perturbed and reckless mood; the events of the evening had in some measure excited him; still more so the bewilderment of having once again been sitting next this beautiful creature, with glimpses of the raven-black tangles of her hair, and an occasional glance from the deep, clear, mystic eyes. And now, when the others had gone on, he turned to her; she became aware of his approach; a sudden touch of apprehension appeared in her face.

“Barbara,” he said—and his tones were low and impassioned, “is it too soon for me to speak?”

She uttered no word—she looked afraid.

“Did you hear what some of those lovers said in the songs?” he went on. “And did you not take it to yourself—as if I were appealing to you? For—for surely you understand. You came to me out of the

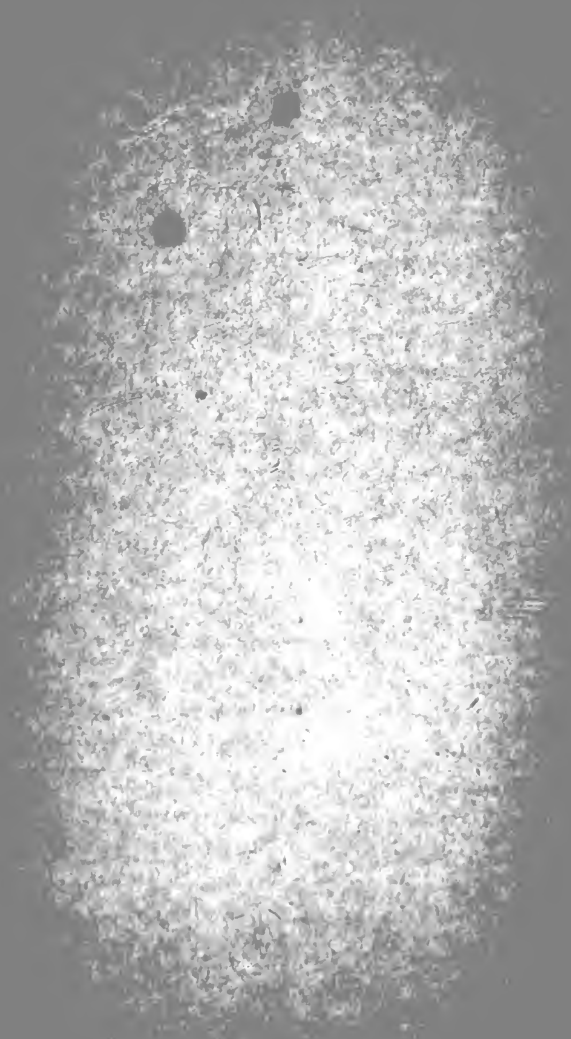
night and the dark; and now I want you to go with me through the long day—the long day that I hope lies before us two together. Will you do that, Barbara? Or is it too soon to ask?”

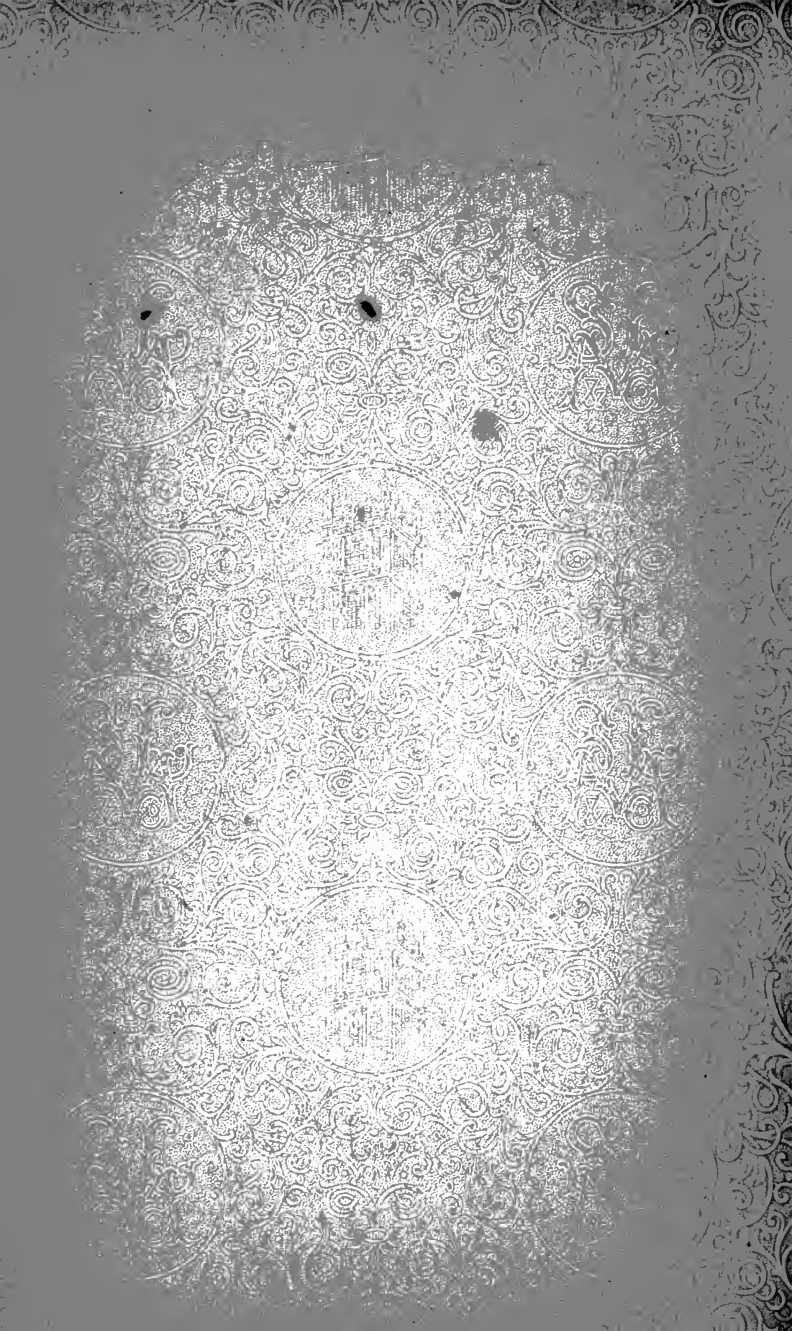
“Yes, yes,” she said, with quick relief, “it is that—it is too soon yet——”

“But only too soon?” he urged, seeking in vain for some answering message from those downcast eyes. “Later on, when you have got used to thinking of it, you will not fear to say yes—you will let me hope for that?”

But again she was silent; and here were Jess and her mother returning from the outer staircase; so that for the present there was no assurance for him—only the solace that now she knew what lay in his mind, burning there like a consuming fire.

END OF VOL. I.





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